THE GENIE TAKES A WIFE

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THERE'S AN OLD AXIOM—

—in the publishing field that an editor who publishes only stories he personally likes ends up reading his own magazine—nobody else is interested.

The answer of course lies in trying to catch the view from where you readers sit and never losing sight of the vast pattern of likes and dislikes involved.

I personally like the light, zany type of fantasy; the kind Thorne Smith used to write. So *"The Genie Takes a Wife,"* in this issue, is right up my street. I got no great boot out of *"The Lavender Talent"* but one of our staff members read it three times before it went to press. Also, I'm sure there will be those of you who claim *"Feud Woman"* is outside the fantasy genre and perhaps it is. But I doubt that a more fantastic heroine than Emily Botford ever appeared in fiction; nor a more dramatic one. I'll certainly be interested in the comments we get about Emily.

Which brings me to my point. We want to hear from you. We want your letters telling us what you like and what you don't like—where we fail and where we succeed. And to make it interesting and show a little appreciation at this end, we're going to pay $25.00 for "The Best Letter of the Month" and make it a regular feature. They'll also be $10.00 and $5.00 for 2nd and 3rd choice. There'll be hardly any restrictions—just that your letter should be (1 about fiction and (2 contribute some little idea or other toward improving *Fantastic*. Letters postmarked inside the first and last days of any month, inclusive, will be considered as entries for that month only. Prize letters for each month will be published two months later.

The staff of *Fantastic* will act as judges and no letters, please, from employees of Ziff-Davis Publishing, or their relatives. Also, personal friends of the *Fantastic* staff are barred.

So get your letters into the mail. Thanks.—PWF.

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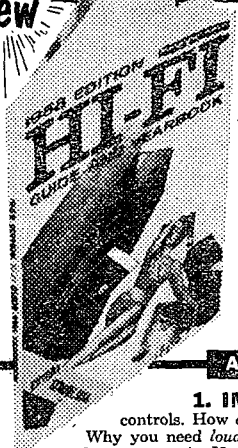

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THE GENIE TAKES A WIFE

By HENRY SLESAR

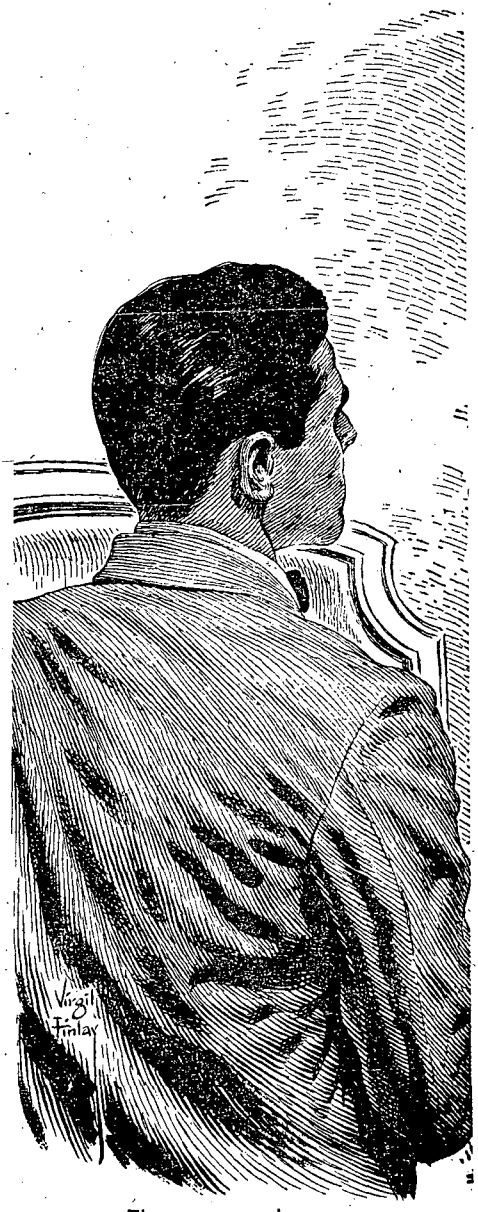
ILLUSTRATOR FINLAY

Jay bought a Genie from a strange little man for ten thousand dollars; one that lived up to every promise. It was what went on in the Genie's bottle that made Jay wish he'd stopped payment on his check.

SITTING alone in the darkened library of his home, the Thought touched Jay Burgess like the cold, clammy hand of a dead man; a Thought that filled his mind and heart with a terror unspeakable and horrifying. Vainly, he fought against the dreadful might of its presence, and then surrendered to it with a fearful gasp.

Marriage!

It was no use struggling. *They* had taken care of all resistance. They had drowned him with perfume and the



There was only one answer

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to the scandalous display. Mommy had gone off her rocker!

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scent of roses. They had dazzled him with cool violet eyes and scarlet lips and off-the-shoulder gowns. They had carried him along the well-trodden road that led inexorably to the altar, and he had been powerless to detour. Before he could gather his senses, he had become the fiance of Dorothea Wardley, and now Society was cooing softly, delightedly, over the coming union of two fine, rich families.

Jay knew he wasn't the first victim of such blitzkrieg tactics, but he found no comfort in the thought. He wasn't ready for marriage, he told himself. He was too young (he wasn't). He was too busy (he wasn't). And most important of all, there was his hobby.

Classical Mythology was Jay Burgess' greatest single love, more demanding, more exciting, more intoxicating than any wife could be. Even Dorothea Wardley. Even beautiful Dorothea. . . .

Jay rubbed his chin. She was beautiful, all right. No doubt of that. But he thought of her, classically, as a Juno more than a Venus, a cold, stony, warrior's wife. Not the kind of wife for Jay Burgess, no matter *how* much her mother thought so.

But the invitations were printed. The notices were posted. The cathedral was reserved, the reception hall waiting, the bridal suite aboard the *Ile de France* expecting. He was lost. Lost!

Chapman, the Burgess butler, put his bald head into the room.

"Will there be something else, sir?"

"No, nothing. Just show Mr. Hassim into the library when he arrives. It's almost ten; he should have been here by now."

"Mr. Hassim?" The butler put fingers to mouth. "Was that the gentleman you were expecting?"

"Of course. He made the appointment this morning; said he'd be here at nine-thirty."

"Oh, dear. I'm afraid I sent Mr. Hassim to the servant's entrance, Mr. Burgess."

"You did what?"

"I'm very sorry, sir. But he looked so—grimy. I thought he was a peddler of some sort."

"Well, get him in here. We have got business together."

"Yes, sir."

Chapman returned five minutes later, reluctantly preceding a short, stoutish man in a ragged gray suit, with a dirty white turban wrapped about his head. Jay looked for Mr. Hassim's face, but couldn't

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find it. There was hair over everything, great black bushes of hair on his cheeks, his chin, his brow. From the middle of the dense forest peeked a brown button of a nose and two glowing eyes.

He marched determinedly towards his host, and Jay, swallowing very hard, said: "Greetings, Mr. Hassim. May Allah protect you."

"Please. I am Episcopalian."

"Oh, sorry. Well, I'm certainly intrigued by what you told me on the phone, Mr. Hassim. If you really have proof."

"I have proof." He sat on the plump cushion of a wing chair and folded his hands in his lap. "You have money?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"You are rich?"

"I'm well-fixed, yes."

"Good," Mr. Hassim nodded. "It would be foolishness for me to talk to anyone but a rich man. I have heard you are much interested in exploring origins of ancient legends. True?"

"It's my hobby," Jay said, adding fervently: "It's my life!"

"Odd. A rich man, with such a pursuit. If I were rich, I would be different." He pulled at his beard. "I would get women."

Jay flushed. "I'm engaged," he said. "In fact, I'm getting married in two weeks."

"No," Mr. Hassim said. "In two weeks, you must be crossing the Mediterranean, through the Suez Canal, down the Red Sea to the port of Yenbo—"

"I must?"

"Yes! If you wish to make the greatest discovery of the age. Marriage! Pah! In my country, we may take wives as we please."

"I thought you were an Episcopalian?"

"Not when I am in my country."

The little bearded man drew something from his coat.

"Here is a map," he said. "It will lead you to the discovery of which I speak."

"An ancient map?"

Mr. Hassim curled his lip. "Don't be an idiot. I drew it myself. But it will lead you to one of the most ancient mysteries of the East. Cash, please," he said briskly. "I dislike checks."

"Wait a minute. Don't you think I'm entitled to more of an explanation? All you said on the phone was something about a Genie—"

"Ah, the Djinn, demons of our ancient ancestors! If I were not so much in need, I would never turn this infor-

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mation over to an infidel!" He shrugged. "But that is my curse. Women. They are concerned only with money."

"Perhaps if you shaved," Jay said meekly.

"No," he answered sadly. "You probably will not believe it, but I am very ugly beneath this beard. Money is the only answer." He looked around the room, and spotted the framed photo on Jay's desk. He hopped off the chair and swept it into his hands. "Aha. This is your woman?"

"That's Dorothea."

Mr. Hassim planted a wet kiss on the glass. "She is a goddess. You are a very fortunate man."

"Thank you."

"But to business. With this map, you will find your way to the trading center of a merchant called Turki Kalid. He is an old fool, and will sell you the bottle I describe for a few coins. Bargain with him; no use being cheated."

"But what's *in* this bottle?"

Mr. Hassim slapped his forehead. "Have I been speaking to a camel? The Genie, of course, the Genie that helped Harun-el-Rashid himself build his mighty kingdom. The Genie that has waited thousands of years for liberty, and will greatly reward him who gives him escape. Surely you know the legends of the Djinn?"

"Of course. But I never thought—"

"That they were more than beggar's tales? What would you say if I told you that I have seen the Genie myself?"

"You have?"

"Yes! In the desert near the camp of this same merchant, Kalid. I was walking across the sands, having lost my camel to bandits, and saw this ancient bottle lying half-covered in a dune. It had been there for many centuries, and now the shifting winds had brought it to the world's notice once more. I uncorked the bottle, and this great rush of smoke emanated from the bottle's mouth, concluding by becoming the mountainous figure of a man in a loincloth. It was the Genie!"

"What happened?" Jay said, round-eyed.

"Well, after I gathered my wits, I decided to extract from the Genie my reward. I asked for my heart's desire, and it was delivered to me. Then the Genie returned to his bottle, and I sold him to the old fool Turki Kalid. And that was all."

"That was all? But I don't understand. What was your heart's desire?"

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"That," Mr. Hassim said stiffly, "is my own business."

"But why did he get back into the bottle? Why did you sell it?"

"Please. I prefer not to discuss it. All I wish now is to sell the map and live out my life in peace. I plan to reside in Des Moines."

"I dunno," Jay said doubtfully. "There's an awful lot of holes in your story, Mr. Hassim. And it doesn't really constitute proof—"

"Proof? Oh, but of course!"

The bearded man reached once more into his coat, and produced what looked like a long, thick black string.

"Here," he said. "It is a hair from the head of the Genie himself. You can see for yourself it is many times the length and thickness of ordinary human hair. That should be your proof!"

Jay took it curiously. "You sure it's genuine?"

"Cross my heart," Mr. Hassim said dramatically, "and hope to die. There, you see? I take upon myself your western curse. Surely, you must believe me now."

"And how much are you asking for the map?"

"How much do you have?"

"I asked you first."

"Would five thousand dollars be too much?"

"No, I think I could manage that—"

"Good. Then the price is ten thousand."

"But you said—"

"Please, Mr. Burgess. I am proud of my bargaining ability. Do not cross wits with me."

"All right," Jay said. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll write you a dated check for ten thousand dollars right now. Then I'll have this—thing—checked by a laboratory and have it verified as human hair. If it's a fake, I'll stop the check. Otherwise, you can have the money."

"You are shrewd," Mr. Hassim nodded. "But I will take the risk."

Jay wrote the check, blotted it neatly, and handed it over. The little bearded man gazed at the figure reverently, and said: "Ah, women! I have you in my power now!"

Then he turned and stalked out.

Jay Burgess expected the worst when the time came to tell Dorothea Wardley of his intentions. First he wrote an explanatory letter, postponing the wedding. Then he prepared himself carefully for an in-person call to the Wardley home. He put his best-fitting suit over his thin frame,

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combed his blond hair into two neat partitions, and slapped his face with stinging after-shave lotion to bring some color into his narrow white cheeks.

When he arrived at the Wardley mansion on Fifth Avenue, he was unsteady in the knees. Dorothea was in the living room, sitting stiffly upright on the sofa, her face a mask of fire and ice—mostly ice.

"Hello, Dorothea," he said. "I hope you're not angry with me."

"Angry? Why should I be? What in the world for?"

"Well, I know how you must feel, having to postpone the wedding and everything. But it won't be for long, I promise."

She smiled mysteriously.

"You see," Jay said, "it's really a marvelous opportunity. The laboratories told me the hair was genuine. I mean, it might not have come from a Genie, but it was certainly composed like human hair. That's why I'm so excited about this expedition."

Dorothea's lovely mouth made a quick gesture.

"I'll only be gone five weeks or so, and then we can get married right away. All right?"

"That's very kind of you, Jay."

"It's all in the interest of science, you know. I'll miss you terribly—"

"No, you won't."

"What's that?"

"You won't miss me, Jay. Because I'm coming with you."

"What?"

"It was Mother's idea. To put it crudely, she feels this expedition of yours is only an alibi; she believes you're trying to escape the wedding. Is that true, Jay?"

"Of course not!"

"Then you won't mind my coming with you. Just to see that you don't end up with a nautch dancer, or something."

"But that's ridiculous! This is no trip for a woman. Why, this is pretty wild country I'm going to! Bandits and things. You wouldn't want to face that."

"You'll protect me, won't you?"

"Well, sure, but—"

"Then it's decided. I'll just get some new clothes and we'll be off. I think I might even enjoy it."

"But it isn't proper," Jay said frantically. "I mean, we are not married yet, Dorothea. What would people say? What would your *mother* say?"

"I know just what Mother

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says. She says she's coming with us, as chaperone."

Jay seemed to collapse all at once at her words. His well-fitted suit went baggy, his combed hair went tousled, his cheeks went whiter than ever. "That's out of the question," he said. "I won't have it, Dorothea!"

"Would you like to tell Mother that?"

"Yes! I mean to. You tell her. This isn't a social tea. This is man's work."

"Then why not tell her yourself?"

Jay glowered, glared, and then relaxed in the posture of defeat he knew was inevitable. No one contested Mrs. Wardley.

"All right," he sighed. "I don't care *who* comes along. As long as I find my Genie."

"You may kiss me," Dorothea said discreetly.

The *Eastern Star* made no pretense at being a luxury liner, and its somber gray hull, spartan cabins, and surly crew were enough to invoke huffy displeasure from three of the four passengers boarding her that overcast June morning. The fourth, Jay Burgess, was too preoccupied with thoughts of Djinn to be concerned with the lack of creature comforts, but Dorothea Wardley, Mrs. Wardley, and Chapman, the butler, all made their distaste evident.

"Hmph," Mrs. Wardley hmphed. "It's not exactly the *Ile de France*. I should think you could have obtained better accommodations, Jayson."

"I'm sorry, but it was the only Mediterranean - bound ship available. I'm sure it will be fine, Mother."

"Mother" sniffed. She sniffed often, through a high-set, formidable nose. Mrs. Wardley, widowed, wasn't a big woman, but her imperious carriage and impressive circumference gave her the look of an old ironclad.

"I don't like the crew much," Dorothea said. "And I don't like the other passengers, either. Did you see that couple on the pier? They look like something right out of *Scarface.*"

"If I may say something—" Chapman the butler twitched his own nose. "There is no running water in the cabins, sir. And I distinctly detected a bedbug in the mattress."

"Stowaway, huh?" Jay tittered, but his three companions stared back woodenly. "Well, it's only two weeks. Let us make the most of it."

They all sniffed at once, and the collective sound was almost as loud as the blast of the

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ship's horn. The *Eastern Star* was weighing anchor.

"We're off;" Jay said delightedly. "To fabled Samarkand! To Baghdad! To the land of Harun-el-Rashid and the flying carpets and the Djinn!" He sniffed the air ecstatically. "I can almost smell them—the rare spices of the Orient."

"Cabbage," Mrs. Wardley said. "They're cooking cabbage for dinner. I don't think I'll *enjoy* this voyage. Come, Dorothea."

There was only one table in the ship's dining room, but it was sufficient for the dozen passengers aboard the freighter. There was little conversation the first night out, but a great deal of discreet staring. When Jay, Dorothea, and Mrs. Wardley returned topdeck after dinner, they exchanged views on their shipmates.

"Did you see them?" Dorothea said. "That couple I told you about?"

"They looked okay to me," Jay said.

"Why, they're perfect criminal types! That man, with his black hair and moustache, and that loud jacket. I'll bet there's a shoulder holster under it!"

"And the woman!" Mrs. Wardley said. "That bleached blonde hair. That tight red sweater! A gangster's moll if I ever saw one!"

"Don't be silly," Jay scoffed.

"Well, I'm having my valuables locked in the purser's safe," Mrs. Wardley said grimly. "We'll be lucky if we're all not murdered in our cabins."

"Let's not think of such things. Just look at those stars!"

"Hmph. Looks like rain to me. I'm going below. Coming, Dorothea?"

Jay stayed on deck, gazing hypnotically at the bright stars dotting the heavens above the calm sea, picking out his favorite mythological characters among the constellations.

He wasn't aware of the girl's presence until her sweatered sleeve touched his arm. Then he gulped and said:

"Good evening. Beautiful night, isn't it?"

"Yeah." The woman pushed back a thick lock of blonde hair. "Got a butt, friend?"

"Pardon?"

"A cigarette. I left mine in the cabin."

"Oh, sure." He handed her one and lighted it, cupping his hand against the breeze. His fingers touched hers, and the flare illuminated a doll-like, youthfully pretty face, with

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blue eyes and a pouting mouth, overpainted with vivid lipstick.

"My name's Blossom Henderson. What's yours, pal?"

"Jay. Jay Burgess. Er, doesn't your husband carry cigarettes?"

"You mean Leon?" She laughed stridently. "He's not my husband. He's my partner."

"Partner? In what?"

"In crime, of course. Leon and me, we're card sharps."

"You are?"

"Certainly. We play all the ships, looking for suckers. You look like a nice joe, so I'll give you fair warning. Don't play cards with us."

"I won't," Jay promised.

"Not that we're looking for a stake this trip. This is strictly a pleasure cruise. We usually work the big ships, like the *Mary* and the *U. S.* We were gonna take the *Ile de France,* but decided it would be too much temptation."

"I see," Jay said. "I was going to take the *Ile de France,* too. On a honeymoon."

"Lucky for both of us, friend. We might have met under different circumstances, and we would have separated you from your bankroll."

"I don't think so. I never play cards."

"Really? What do you do for kicks?"

"Oh, I have my hobby. Classical mythology."

"Sounds like a disease."

"It isn't. It's a wonderful study."

"Tell me about it."

"You really want to hear?" Jay looked at her in surprise.

"Sure, pal."

Jay started to talk. He talked without stopping for almost two hours. Blossom Henderson turned out to be the best listener he had met in years, and her attentiveness seemed to be born of genuine interest in his subject. She listened in fascination to his studies in Greek and Roman legends, Chinese folklore, Indian mysticism, and most of all, the exotic mythology of ancient Arabia. When he recounted the purpose of his expedition, her babyish eyes were as blue and round as Wedgewood saucers.

"And you mean there really is such a thing? A real honest-to-God Genie?"

"So I'm lead to believe," Jay said eagerly. "It'll be the find of the century if I can lay my hands on that bottle. Why I'll probably get a Ph.D. out of it!"

"A p.h.d.? I thought a Genie comes out?"

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"Yes, of course. I mean, I'll probably get heaped with all kinds of scholastic honors."

"I don't get it," Blossom said, cocking her pretty head. "If this Genie guy can grant any wish, why bother with that stuff? Why not just ask for a million bucks and let it go at that?"

"But I don't need money. I have lots of money."

"You do?"

"Tons of it. My great-great-grandfather invented toilet paper. Our family's made millions out of it."

"You don't play cards?"

"No," Jay blinked, not understanding the question. "Anyway, it's not the *material* reward I'm after. I just want to accomplish something for science."

Blossom's eyes narrowed. "And you say you have this old map?"

"It's a new map. This fellow Hassim drew it for me."

"Gee, I'd love to see it."

"You would?" Jay said, pleased by her attitude. "Well, if you'd like to stop at my cabin—"

"Sure. Let's go."

It was past midnight, and the only sounds on board were the quiet lapping of the water, the steady thrum of the ship's engines, and the rhythmic snoring of Chapman, the butler, in the cabin next door. Jay sat on the bunk with Blossom Henderson beside him, and opened his suitcase to extract Mr. Hassim's map. He spread it on his lap, and enthusiastically traced its winding path with his finger.

"Too much for me," Blossom said, shaking her head. "I can't even read a road map. Hey, you know? I just noticed something. You're cute."

Jay looked at her; it was the first time they had enjoyed closeups in the light. He blushed at her description, but did not fail to notice her own attractiveness.

"Well, I guess we'd better say goodnight," he said uneasily. "It's almost two bells."

"It's what?" She inched closer on the bunk.

"Two bells," Jay gulped. "That's ship talk. For one o'clock."

"Why do they call it two bells if it's one o'clock?"

"I don't know. Don't you think you'd better get back to your cabin? Leon will be wondering where you are."

"Leon? Hey, you think Leon and I share the same cabin? What kind of a girl do you think I am?"

"I didn't mean anything."

"Our arrangement's strictly business. I'm the come-on and

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he's the cheat. It's all on the up-and-up."

"Whatever made you turn to crime?"

"Oh, money, I guess," Blossom said blithely. "I like nice things. This sweater, for instance."

"It's very nice," Jay said.

"Real cashmere. Soft as a baby's. Feel it."

"It *is* nice," Jay said.

There was thunder in the cabin. Jay Burgess opened his eyes and interpreted the sound, correctly, as Mrs. Wardley's fist hammering on the door.

"Jayson! It's almost eleven o'clock!"

"Six bells," Blossom Henderson murmured, shifting on the bunk and throwing her arm about his neck.

"Oh, dear," Jay said. "Be right out, Mother!"

"Your mother's here?" Blossom opened one eye.

"No, it's Dorothea's mother. She's my fiancée, Dorothea, I mean. I—I neglected to tell you about her last night. This would be very embarrassing for me if—"

"We'll be on the forward deck," Mrs. Wardley shouted from the other side of the door. "Shall I send Chapman in to you?"

"No!" Jay answered, his voice cracking. "I won't need him this morning."

"Who's Chapman?" Blossom whispered.

"My butler. He's accompanying me on the expedition."

Blossom giggled. "A butler! Isn't that cute?"

"We better get out of here," Jay said.

He left the cabin first, and met Dorothea and her mother on the deck. They were both decidedly cool to him.

"It's almost lunch time," his fiancée said. "What kept you up so late?"

"Oh, I was reading. Nothing like curling up with a good book. Heh-heh."

Mrs. Wardley sighed; it was almost a groan. "Oh, my," she said, staring out over the rail at the churning sea. "I'm afraid this will be a very tedious trip. I don't see how we'll ever get through it."

"Me, too," Dorothea said, despondently.

"Oh, I dunno," Jay Burgess said. "I think it might be fun." He shut his eyes and smiled blissfully.

For Mrs. Wardley, the thirteen-day voyage across the southern Atlantic, through the Mediterranean, down the Red Sea to the port city of Yenbo, was aptly described as

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tedious. For Dorothea, her daughter, the trip was a monumental bore. For Chapman, a terrible snob, the trip was a succession of indignities and outrages from first to last. But to Jay Burgess, the trip was a combination of delights, an anthology combining the best parts of *Two Years Before the Mast,* the *Arabian Nights,* and *How to Have a Happy Sex Life.* The sea had been calm, the journey had been swift, and Blossom Henderson had turned out to be a most able-bodied seaman.

But the voyage had to end. They arrived at the port of Yenbo, said their good-byes to the crew and fellow-passengers, and rented a touring car through the offices of the American Express agency in the city.

The driver, a grinning likeable fellow, chattered at them merrily throughout the long drive to Medina, some hundred and thirty miles east. Unfortunately, he spoke only Arabic, and his conversation was less than absorbing. The trip over the dust-laden roads was fatiguing, but the first sight of the great stone walls of the ancient holy city, with its towers and gates reminiscent of drawings in Jay's childhood edition of Burton's, stirred him to a high pitch of excitement.

They entered through the Bab al-Salem gate, and caught sight of their first desert caravans, pausing to rest in the city suburbs. An inner wall surrounded the heart of the city, a sprawling, complex settlement of small houses and tortuous streets, of glorious mosques with minarets and lofty domes, of marketplaces crowded with loud-voiced buyers and sellers, a bustling railroad terminal that connected the city with Damascus. All in all, Jay found Medina much as he expected, and the mood of antiquity was strong upon him.

But Dorothea, her mother, and Chapman, the butler, looked at their surroundings, and sniffed.

The driver took the car down the busy market street of al-Suq, turning into a narrow alleyway, and pulling up to the entrance of a Moorish-style building. It was hardly an imposing edifice.

"Is this it?" Dorothea said. "Doesn't look like much of a hotel."

"Well, it's not quite a hotel," Jay said. "The Express company arranged for us to stay with a man called Abu Samhadin. He was educated in America. This is his house."

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"I'll bet the plumbing's terrible," Mrs. Wardley said.

Their host came out to greet them. He was an imposing man in a white linen suit, wickedly handsome, with a trim black beard and moustache and features as sharp as scimitars. He bowed to them in greeting, his white eyes lingering longest over Dorothea. His gaze seemed rooted to her.

"Welcome," he said. "I have eagerly awaited this visit."

"Pleased to meet *you*," Mrs. Wardley simpered.

Despite the shabby exterior, the home of Abu Samhadin was magnificent within. The main room was exotically decorated, and there was a three-quarter-ton air conditioner pouring cool air into the house. They sat around and sipped superior wine, eating a variety of tree-borne figs and dates. For the first time since the trip began, Dorothea and her mother seemed content. Especially Mrs. Wardley, who tittered girlishly at Abu Samhadin's every glance. As for Abu, his eyes were only for Dorothea, and if Jay had been less preoccupied with thoughts of the Genie, he might have been upset by the obviousness of the glances.

"Well, now," Abu said, tearing his dark eyes from Dorothea's flushed face. "Tell me of this glorious discovery you are about to make."

"We're going to find a Genie," Jay said.

Abu coughed into his fist. "I beg your pardon?"

"A Genie. A Djinn. Whatever you call it. I have reason to believe there's one not far from here."

His host was smiling, and the smile was faintly contemptuous.

"Surely you are joking? The story of the Djinn is a story from the childhood of our race. You cannot seriously believe in their existence?"

"I have my reasons," Jay said, offended.

"I see. And what will you do with this Genie if you find him? Ask him to grant your fondest wish? I hardly think a man could wish for anything more—than you have already." He looked pointedly at Dorothea, and she blushed.

"I want him for scientific reasons," Jay said. "I don't care about the wishes. Of course, it *might* be interesting. Just to see what he *can* do."

"And how do you go about this search?"

"Oh, I have a map. I bought it in the States."

"A map," Abu repeated, covering a smile with his hand. "And I presume you

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paid a great deal for this—map?"

"Sure. But it'll be worth it."

"Undoubtedly. But I must be grateful to this map, since it brings such loveliness into my poor home." He looked at Dorothea again, but it was Mrs. Wardley who tittered.

Upstairs, in the large, comfortable bedroom provided by his host, Jay unpacked his suitcases with the help of Chapman.

"Better put the map in a safe place," he said. "Where is the damn thing anyway?"

"I really can't say, sir."

"I had it right here, in the small suitcase."

"Nothing but clothing in the suitcase, sir."

"That can't be!" He dug frantically through the socks, shirts, and underwear. "It was right on top—"

"You must be mistaken, sir."

"I *know* it's here!"

He searched again, more throughly than before. He searched through all his suitcases, until he realized the staggering truth.

"It's gone!" he said, his voice trembling. "The map is gone!"

The despair which descended on Jay Burgess was worsened by the indifference of his companions. Both Dorothea and Mrs. Wardley seemed unaffected by the shocking news of the map's disappearance. Chapman, the butler, seemed plainly relieved, and began to speak of an early return to what he called "civilization." And Jay's host, Abu Samhadin, seemed only amused by the story of the missing document, and hinted, delicately, that perhaps it was all for the best.

As for Jay, he was doubly crushed. Not only was he deprived of his key to the Genie, but he realized now why the pretty Miss Henderson had been so attracted to him. She wanted the Genie, too, and for far less admirable reasons. Her voyage might yet be profitable.

In the morning, he came down to breakfast to find that Abu had taken Dorothea and her mother on a guided tour of the city. Chapman was sulking in his room upstairs. He sat in front of the air conditioner and tried to recreate the map from memory, but his memory had never been too good. It was hopeless.

He left the house and wandered about the strange winding streets of Medina, trying to overcome his depression by enjoyment of the sights, sounds, and smells of the old city. But even the exotic at-

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mosphere couldn't dispel his mood.

At a corner bazaar, desultorily examining a thick stack of rugs, he looked up at the sound of American speech. At the end of the shop, a man in a hound's-tooth jacket was trying to make himself understood by the Arabian merchant, without much success. He came closer, and recognized the glossy black hair and moustache of Leon, Blossom's partner in crime.

"Excuse me—"

The man turned and looked at him sharply. Then he took off his hat and said: "Well, if it ain't Mr. Burgess. Hiya, Mr. Burgess. What are you doing here?"

"I'm staying here. Er—how is Blossom?"

His face darkened. "Don't ask me. That little tramp ran out on me back in Yenbo. How do you like that for a dame?"

"Gosh, that's too bad. Where did she go?"

"Who cares?" He shook his head mournfully. "I taught her every dirty trick she knows, the little ingrate. Then she runs out on me. How about that?"

"Look," Jay said. "Can we go someplace and talk? Maybe we can help each other."

"Sure," Leon said, but suspiciously.

They went to a wine shop, and over pungent glasses of some fiery white stuff, Jay told him the story of Mr. Hassim, the Genie, Dorothea, and Blossom's criminal act. He left out some salient points about how she got the map, but it seemed only politic.

"So that's why she ran out, huh?" Leon cracked his knuckles menacingly. "She had a line on this Genie gimmick, and she didn't want to share. Dirty little rat."

"We have to find her," Jay said intensely. "I'll pay anything if you help me."

"Five grand and expenses?"

"Yes!"

"Okay, then it's a cinch. If I know Blossom, she'll have the Express company arrange the whole business for her. All we gotta do is call them and get her itinerary."

"Why didn't I think of that?" Jay said. He grabbed Leon's arm and they went off together.

They went to the telegraph office at the railway station, and sent the inquiry through to the Express agency in Yenbo, stressing the importance of locating Miss Henderson at once. The reply was prompt: Miss Henderson had hired a car and driver, destination, Hajariya or vicinity."

"Only one thing to do now,"

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Leon said. "Take your car and follow her."

"But we can't leave right away. I'll have to tell Dorothea—"

"If we wait another minute, it might be too late."

"You're right," Jay said grimly. "Let's get started."

When Jay Burgess climbed into the front seat of the touring car beside Leon, the card sharp, he didn't know he was beginning one of the most hectic journeys of his life. It started off fine, with the roads affording good traction after a surprise rainfall. But when they were thirty-five miles outside of Medina, the car started to choke and gasp and wheeze rheumatically, and finally expired with a dusty cough. They waited an hour in the broiling sun until rescued by a passing caravan, who provided the lumpy backs of camels for the next forty miles. They took still another caravan at a midpoint oasis, heading for Harajiya, and it was almost evening by the time they caught sight of the town itself.

Weary, aching in every bone, particularly the posterior, covered with dust, enervated by heat, and generally convinced that death was near, Jay Burgess began to wonder if the game was worth the candle. But something happened to give him renewed hope. They were watering the camels at an oasis outside the city, when one of the English-speaking Arab guides emerged from a laughter-filled conversation with a group of merchants, and returned to their side, still chuckling.

"What's so funny?" Leon said irritably.

"You will pardon me," the guide said. "But there has been a woman, a young woman of your country, who has been buying old wine bottles by the score. She is paying remarkable prices for them, and the traders are amused by this."

"Blossom!" Jay gasped.

"Where is she now?" Leon said.

"At the inn of Ibn Ridyah, where she has taken her strange collection."

"And where is this inn?"

The guide looked at them curiously. "I shall take you there, if you so desire."

The inn of Ibn Ridyah turned out to be a blocky stone building near the outskirts of Harajiya. Its only decoration was a faded red Coco-cola sign hanging over the entrance. They entered the single room that composed the interior,

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and saw the giggling Arab women surrounding the wooden table in the center.

They moved closer, and the Arabs parted to let them see Blossom Henderson staring owlishly at a regiment of wine bottles stretching from one end of the table to the other. From the look on her face, it was obvious that Blossom had been sampling as she was searching.

"Come on out, l'il Genie," she was saying, into the necks of an uncorked bottle. " 'S me, Blossom. Your ol' pal. Come on out 'n' play."

"Hah!" Leon said.

She looked up blearily. "Go way," she said. "Giddoutahere. Lookin' for my frien', the Genie. Come on out, l'il Genie. Come on an' gimmee that million bucks—"

"Blossom!" Jay said. "I mean Miss Henderson. Did you take the map from my cabin?"

"Well, if it ain't the professor! Hiya, professor. Help me look for the Genie, huh?"

"Where'd you get the bottles? From Turki Kalid?"

"Sure, jus' like the map said. Nice ol' fella, Turkey. Sold me *all* his bottles. Now I can find that nice l'il ol' Genie and get my million bucks."

Jay's eyes traveled over the bottles. Was his search really over?

"Have you opened them all?"

"Jus' half a dozen, so far. Taste kinda good, too. Wanna open the others for me?"

"Sure—"

"But remember! I get my million bucks first!"

"Anything you say," Jay told her.

He beckoned towards Leon, and they began opening bottles. The old corks were stiff in the glass, and each opening was a chore that lasted several minutes. It was almost half an hour before they reached the last two bottles at the end of the row, and Jay began to despair.

"Just two left," he whispered.

"Might as well do it," Leon said, and began tugging.

Five minutes later, the cork popped, and Blossom said: "Whoopee! Happy New Year!"

But nothing happened.

"One bottle left," Jay said quaveringly.

He picked it up. It was a long-necked, dark-colored bottle, thick with dust. He shook it, but heard no sound. When he pulled at the cork, it resisted mightily. He applied the corkscrew.

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The Girl In The Mirror

By E. N. SARGENT

ILLUSTRATOR FINLAY

Warning to new brides: Don't worry about living home wreckers. Just keep your eyes on the dead ones!

FROM THE DIARY OF CORA LARSEN:

June 14 1957

OUR wedding night was an old-fashioned one after all! After going steady for two years, I was as nervous as a cat. And Jim—my darling Jim—suddenly seemed to forget the wonderful times we've had together, and turned into a regular Victorian Bridegroom. He ushered me into his apartment as if I had never been there before, and left me alone in the bedroom for what seemed like hours. When he finally joined me his face was terribly serious. He stood staring at the white chiffon negligee I bought for the occasion, with the strangest look on his face. I practically had to pull him into bed. When we were both safely tucked in, I noticed that his hands were ice cold. "Is this what marriage does?" I said. "In that case, living in sin is better."

"We never 'lived' together," he said.

I tried to bring a light note into the proceedings. "No, we just had the sin without the living." It wasn't a very talented joke, but it was a try. Ever notice that the more serious sex gets the less apt it is to work out well? But Jim was in an off-beat mood all right.

"Let me look at you," he said. "Stand over there and let me look at you."

"Baby," I said, "It's cold outside."

"Never mind that," he said softly. "Please." So I got out of bed and stood by the window. The room was dark but

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When a wife couldn't interest her husband under these circumstances—the situation was desperate!

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the light from the street filtered through the blinds. I suddenly felt naked and exposed in a way I never had before. I wondered what Jim could be thinking about, he was silent for such a long time.

"Carrot-top," he said. "Did you ever think of changing the color of your hair?" This was the last thing I expected to hear at such a moment, but I bore up under it as well as I could. "What color would you like, Mr. Larsen?" I said, "Red?" Another poor joke, because if there is one thing I have it is red hair—very bright and very red.

"Yes," he said, "your hair is sort of orange. Ever think of making it darker? I don't know what the color I mean is called, but it's more an auburn shade. It has purple shadows in it. Look in the mirror, you see?" So I looked, and sure enough in the dimness my hair did look different—darker, and somehow mysterious.

"Come on back to bed, beautiful," he said, "now that I've really seen my bride."

So I did like the man said, and turned on the bedside lamp. Jim has always liked the light on, but as a Victorian Bridegroom character he reached across me for the switch and turned it off again. . . .

Afterwards, I lay awake thinking about what he had said. I thought what an odd thing it was for him to have suggested, and I wondered what he was like before we met two years ago.

Who was it who gave him a taste for dark-red hair?

June 26

Terribly humid and hot. Jim could get a week off, but he absolutely refuses to budge. Have decided to buy an air-conditioner on the installment plan.

June 30

No let-up in the heat wave. This old brownstone simply laps up the sun. Even after dark you can't breathe in here. The air-conditioning helps, but of course I bought too small a unit or something, and just one room really cools off. Naturally I put the unit in the bedroom, but you can't stay in the bedroom all the time. That's the trouble with these old buildings, no matter how they fix them up they still have a lot of drawbacks. Jim doesn't seem to notice them, but then he never kept house in here.

They may have tiled the bathroom a beautiful green

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and put in a built-in bar, but the kitchen stove is straight from the antique shop and the sink must have been designed for midgets. I'm no giant but to do anything in that kitchen I have to bend over. Which makes for a lot of good clean fun when Jim is around, but is a bore when the female is alone. I suggested moving the other night, and Jim balked like a mule. Said we'd never get a bargain like this again. He's been here since he got out of college. His man-about-town days were spent within these here walls and I guess he's attached to them.

July 4

Well, Mr. and Mrs. Larsen, at home at 162 E. 62nd Street, just had their first real fight. Mr. L. walked out of the house and Mrs. L. had a good cry. What started it? Who knows? Writing it all down may turn up a clue.

It was a holiday, so we spent the morning in bed. Perhaps we spent too much of the morning in bed, perhaps we should have gotten out of bed and read a good book. Perhaps we shouldn't have tried to talk to each other on such a hot day. Or perhaps we should have done a little more talking before sending out the wedding announcements. It's amazing how little you find out about a person until you really live together. Jim Larsen, the tall dark commercial artist with the intriguing touch of abstraction in his smile, turns out, on closer inspection, to be Larsen the Husband, who seems to withdraw into himself more and more as the days go by.

I merely asked him who he used to know with auburn hair, and he started snapping about privacy. But perhaps it would be easier if I just put down the conversation as it made itself. Someday when he's in a better mood I'll show it to him:

Me: I merely asked *who* she was, not *what* she was.

Him: You must be crazy. I never knew anybody with auburn hair. Just because I said once I thought you'd look nice with hair that color. Drop it, will you?

Me: What's the matter with the shade I already have?

Him: Skip it. I'm sorry I ever mentioned it.

A silence.

Me: Why be so sensitive? All men have some woman they remember. Often it's the first girl they go with, who marks them with her type.

Him: Why don't you go

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into the head-shrinking business if you're so smart.

Me: All joking aside, you remind me of that man in the Colette story.

Him: What man?

Me: The one who was in love with a white cat.

Him: *Are you nuts?*

Me: The cat was a symbol of his earlier life before he met his wife.

Him: You're not nuts, you're just over-educated. And you have a dirty mind on top of it. I don't like cats. I never kept a cat in my life. This is ridiculous.

Another silence.

Me: Why do you turn the light off when we're making love? You never used to.

Him: I never liked the light on, I just left it on to please you.

Me: And now we're married you don't care about pleasing me any more, is that it?

Him: Leave me alone. Can't a man have any privacy at all?

Me: *Isn't* that it?

Him: (getting up and starting to dress) I'm getting out of here. I'll be back sometime—when you're less of a shrew.

Me: Shrew! You'd be a shrew too if you did any cooking in that kitchen! Why can't we move out of here into a modern apartment.

Him: I like it here and I'm staying here. You can move if you like. (Exit Him)

And that, Dear Diary, is how we spent our July 4th. So here I sit, hour after hour, waiting. At first I was angry, but soon that burned off and left me with a weak, anxious feeling. When will he be back? What can I have said that was so terrible? *Who is the auburn-haired-woman?* Perhaps he is with her right now. Maybe . . .

This place is stifling, but I hate to go into the bedroom where we had that quarrel. I can hear the clock tick. It ticks very slowly. Perhaps there are places in a man's life where no one can go.

If only we could move into another apartment! The rooms here are large, but there's a dark-brown stuffiness about them, even after being painted white. The carpet in the hall keeps you from hearing anyone until they're right outside the door. What if someone were out there now? As I write this, my hand trembles. I ought to go to the door and throw it open to reassure myself, but I can't. It is physically impossible for me to move at this

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moment. What am I afraid of? Why do I feel haunted?

October 1

Autumn. My favorite season in New York. Everybody walking a little faster, getting new clothes, meeting new people. A new man came to work at the office, reminds me of Jim when we first met. He looked young to me, though, and that thought led to another thought which went: If he looks young to you, how do you look to him? All is vanity. Decided to do something drastic about self. A change in order. Senior editor passed a remark also, something to the effect that women have to change their appearance once in a while to look smart. Decided to dye hair auburn at last. Will not tell Jim until the deed is done. Give him a surprise.

Our sex life has not been all it might be, lately. Nowadays it's always lights out, and I have the curious feeling that Jim is remote from me. I can't help responding to his love-making, but what is he feeling, if anything? I know he feels something, because he usually sleeps afterwards, but he scarcely makes a sound during the embrace, and his face is often turned away from me. Staleness? The result of familiarity? Good thing I have other things to occupy my mind. Let's see what a change of color will do.

October 2

Arrived home after work with bunch of autumn leaves and hair colored auburn. It seems to change my whole personality, I don't feel like myself. I feel older, and at the same time more attractive. But how I feel about it is not important; the effect on Jim was great. Usually when I get home he's already there, reading a magazine and having a drink. Sometimes he hardly looks up when I come in. But tonight he was different. He stood up, and his eyes actually shone. "You look beautiful," he said. Then, without even caring that the maid was still in the kitchen, he took me in his arms and said, "Come on. Let's go to bed." We locked the bedroom door and turned on the radio so we wouldn't be overheard. "Put on that white nightgown," he said. "The one you wore on our wedding night."

"It's not a nightgown," I said, "it's a negligee." But my heart was beating so fast I could hardly speak.

"Beautiful, beautiful," he

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said as I stood before him. "You beautiful thing."

As he carried me to the bed, a tune came over the air that I hadn't heard for years. "Love that song," said Jim. "What is it?"

"Something popular back in the thirties. Called *Deep Purple,* I think."

"Like your hair," Jim said. "Like the shadows in your beautiful, exciting hair."

October 6

Everybody at the office crazy about my new hair. But the effect seems to have worn off in the home. Jim back at his old tricks, sitting up way past midnight and brooding—about what? Me just tired enough after a day's work to drop off to sleep instead of staying awake worrying about him.

October 25

Larsen won't play at all any more.

October 26

Have found out about *her!*

Looking back over the last months I see that I did one swell job of kidding myself. I expected the phone to ring any minute, and for *her* to be on the other end. I expected Jim to come home any night with that Look a man has. I even expected to hear a knock and find her outside the door!

But now I know the story I feel relieved, even if it is all a bit peculiar. I told Jim I couldn't stand having a mystery between us any more, and that I'd even been thinking of leaving him. He was sitting with an abstracted look on his face and not paying much attention to me, but finally he said, "It's such a minor thing to make such a production about. If there's going to be all this nagging I might as well explain the little there is to explain. Then maybe we'll have some peace around here."

I didn't like his tone, but I couldn't help telling him to go on.

"It happened a long time ago," he said. "You know, there are all kinds of women a man runs into, some of them pretty queer. And sometimes an experience will leave a mark on him, as you have so often said."

"Please tell me about it," I begged.

"All right. Here goes.

"When I first came to New York, I didn't have much money. I had a new job, and enough to eat, and some good clothes, and an education. I lived in a YMCA and saved my salary. The first thing I

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intended to have was a good apartment—a place where I could entertain beautiful women. There were beautiful women all over the place and most of them smiled at me. I knew that if I had the right setting I wouldn't have much trouble luring them into it. So as soon as I had the cash for two months' rent and a month's security, I looked through the real estate section and found this place. I took it and moved in. It meant a lot to me for some reason, and my first night in here I celebrated. I didn't know anyone to ask up, but I bought a bottle of French champagne and a jar of good caviar, and sat on the edge of the bed with a packing case for a table. It was one of those hot sultry nights in June, and everybody had their windows wide open. I could hear people quarrelling and making love and playing the piano and just talking, and all of a sudden I felt so lonely I thought I'd jump out the window. Sitting alone on my bed drinking warm champagne (the icebox didn't work) and imagining myself a bon vivant wasn't much fun. I longed for someone, anyone, to keep me company. I thought of walking out into the streets and picking up a girl, or going to a bar and talking to strangers, but somehow I couldn't. Try to imagine how I felt.

"So you see," he said, "I was glad when there was a knock at the door. I would have been glad to welcome the Fuller Brush Man. But it was not the Fuller Brush Man, it was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. She had dark red hair and white skin, the kind of skin that reminds you of gardenias, and she was wearing a gardenia in her hair."

"I see," I said.

"No you don't. Let me go on. She was wearing a white negligee that left very little to the imagination, and she was smiling. I thought she must be one of the other new tenants, and that she had come to borrow some ice. The building had just been remodelled.

"I'll bet you need some ice," I said. "Won't you come into my parlor for a minute?" Well, she just kept on smiling, and nodded, and closed the door behind her. It was only then that I realized my icebox was out of order, too. So I couldn't help her there.

"Ah—I have no ice," I said, but I can offer you some fine warm champagne.

"And so she sat down beside me on the bed and drank

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the bottle of champagne with me."

"And then?"

"That's all."

"I don't understand."

"I don't understand either. Of course I tried to kiss her after the first glass, but she wouldn't. Then as we finished the bottle, she got up to go.

"Please don't go," I said. "Stay with me?"

"She seemed to hesitate, but finally shook her head, still smiling. My hopes sank. I let her go to the door without stopping her. But there she turned, and said, 'I'll be back.'

"So I sat down on the bed, and waited. I never saw her again."

"She didn't come back ever?"

"Not that night or ever. I thought sure I'd see her on the stairs or in the hall, but I never did. She must have just been visiting somebody that night."

I told him I thought she sounded like an ordinary old-fashioned tease. I didn't like the story very much, but there was so little to it that I couldn't very well dislike it. I can see how such an experience might leave a lasting impression, though.

"I knew you would understand," Jim said. "I knew you'd understand when you changed your hair."

October 27

"What was her name?" I asked Jim this morning after his second cup of coffee.

"Name?" he said. "Whose name?"

"The name of that girl you told me about last night."

He considered. "I think she was more a woman than a girl."

"Woman, then."

"Her name was one of those made-up names they give models. I think she called herself Poppy. She was from someplace in the south."

"Oh. Was she a model?"

"I think so. Actually the whole thing seems so much like a fantasy now that the details have sort of faded away. But her name was Poppy, I do know that."

Poppy! From "someplace in the south!" And a model. Not much to go on. Still, where there's a will there's a way, unless curiosity kills the cat.

October 30

Jim says I'm impossible, always after him about his experience with the strange woman called Poppy. I somehow feel that if he can remember more about it, it will come to mean less. He says

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I'm getting a worse fixation on the whole thing than he ever had.

Thanksgiving Day

Another holiday. Can't stand this tension any longer. Have made up my mind to find that girl, and ask her over here. If she didn't have so much mystery about her, neither one of us would be bothered. Nowadays we look at each other at times as if we were going batty. Sometimes I think Jim looks at me as if he hates me. Yet I just can't keep from asking questions, bringing up the subject.

December 1

Now it's December! What to give Mr. Larsen for Christmas is the question. I think what I'll give him this year is a bottle of champagne and Miss Poppy for a guest. But seriously, why not?

December 2

Called all the model agencies in town today, and asked for "Poppy." None of them have any Poppy registered. I give up.

December 13

News of Poppy! O'Donnell, the oldest and largest model agency, called and asked if I could come in for a few minutes, Mr. O'Donnell would like to talk to me himself. It seems the girl is no longer with them, but he thinks he might be able to be helpful. It pays to advertise. We use a lot of his models on the magazine, so I suppose he's anxious to do what he can for us, meaning in this case me. Till tomorrow then, Poppy!

December 14

What a strange day. I can hardly believe I have lived through it. Woke up in the morning with that feeling of "something about to happen." Did my best job of makeup and wore one of the new profile hats.

When I walked into O'Donnell's office, he gave a kind of gasp and said, "Poppy?"

It was almost as if he thought *I* was *she*. Then he said, "Excuse me, but the color of your hair—and with that hat reminding me of the thirties—"

"The thirties?"

"1938, to be exact. The last time I saw her—the girl you called to ask about. Poppy Lanier. A great model."

I was at a loss to know what to answer him. I could only echo stupidly, "1938?"

Then he asked me to sit down, and drew out a file. "I keep files on all the girls who

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go through this office," he said. "Each of these folders contains the history of a beautiful woman. When you called, I wasn't sure I could help you, but having seen you I think I can. You look enough like Poppy Lanier to be her younger sister. Ever think of modelling? Poppy's style is coming back."

"No," I said. I felt rather weak.

"You ought to give it a try," he said. "Think of the money you could make. If you're as good as I think you are—and I've never been wrong yet—you could make thirty an hour to start."

I have to admit I was flattered. "Tell me more about my double," I said. "The girl I remind you of."

"Poppy came from a little town in South Carolina. She was a natural beauty, but after we polished her up she was a knockout. Look."

At last I saw the face that had kept me awake nights. Delicate brows, rich full mouth, exquisite cheekbones. The dark red hair photographed black. In one picture she was wearing a sheer white negligee, and a gardenia in her luxuriant hair.

"You haven't seen her since 1938?" I repeated. "We—we've seen her since then. It was in the summer of 1952. Only we lost track of her afterwards, and we wondered . . ."

"You couldn't have seen her in 1952, my dear," O'Donnell said. "What you must have seen was a reflection of yourself in some mirror." He laughed. "Are you *sure* you're not related to her?"

"Oh, yes," I said. "I'm sure." It was then that the strangeness struck me with such force. I felt myself turning pale, or perhaps blushing. "Did she—did she have a husband?"

"Oh, yes. But they didn't get along too well. Like so many beautiful girls, Poppy had love troubles. There's a type of man, you know, who isn't really fond of women. For some reason this type always seems to get hold of a beautiful woman, to punish her for something twisted in himself, by making her feel unloved. I've seen it happen again and again . . ."

"But why are the girls attracted to this type of man in the first place?"

"Maybe they feel challenged. Anyway, I remember Poppy's husband had quite a hard time with his alibi."

"Alibi!" I said. "Do you mean Poppy is *dead?*"

"You're too young to have

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been in New York at the time. But here, look at this."

I put my hand out for the newspaper clipping he held. When I touched it, I felt a sort of thrill, as if I had touched something I shouldn't. It was yellow and thin under my fingers and the print had faded. The sense of it was that a beautiful model named Poppy Lanier had died of an overdose of veronal in her apartment at 162 E. 62nd Street. There was a picture of the building, and although it's been remodelled since then, it was certainly this very house. An arrow pointed to the second floor front — Poppy's bedroom. Which is now ours.

If Poppy died in 1938 who was it, then, who visited Jim in 1952?

Can it be that there are such things waiting for living people, haunting the places they have known, ready to draw us to them?

Or was that visitor of his a mere coincidence—one of those coincidences that happen so often and are only noticed later, if at all?

Whatever it is, I'm exhausted thinking about it. My head is splitting, I simply can't figure it all out. Best thing is to lie down for a while, get some sleep.

Night. Finally woke up after sleeping for hours as if drugged. Had the strangest dream, almost as if I were sleepwalking, or not dreaming at all. I dreamed I was asleep, and that I got out of my bed, with nothing on, and wandered around the room. I went over to the full-length mirror and stared at myself. The reflection stared back, until it almost seemed as if we were hypnotizing each other. Thought of becoming a model, as O'Donnell suggested. Decided to try it. Thought of what he'd said about a certain type of man not really caring for women. I decided I'd have to look for a man with more warmth than Jim. I felt a terrible sense of loss, and began to cry. Reflection cried also, burying her face in her hands. Looked through my fingers and saw her wavy, dark-red hair, her tears. She was looking back at me, pleadingly. On a strange impulse, I pressed myself against the glass. She met me. I felt the cold of the mirror along my naked body. Again deep sleep.

From now on I won't have time to write. It's wonderful to have a body again!

Poppy!

THE END

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The little country store

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FEUD WOMAN

suddenly became wonderland.

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FEUD WOMAN

By S. HILARY

ILLUSTRATOR LEWELLYN

Out of Emily's brutalized soul came a grim resolution: Her children had to stop dying!

HE WAS a big man, with huge biceps and shoulders. His hooded eyes and the tilt of his head reminded me of a hawk, and there was hostility in the way he jumped down from the wagon and landed on the balls of his feet as though set for trouble.

This was in Pleasanton, a little farm town in the southern Idaho irrigation country in the spring of nineteen fourteen. I was working out of Pleasanton at the time—riding ditch for the Mountain State Water Company—and I'd just bumped into Ma Struver in front of Henry Plummer's store.

Ma had been telling me how she and Luke, her wispy husband, had splinted up the left foreleg of their bay gelding after the fool horse stepped into a gopher hole. Halfway through the telling, she stopped to count the heads poked out from under the rig's canvas top. "Nine," she said. "Glory be! What a family!"

But it was the woman on the front seat who interested me. Peculiarly. I looked at her and thought of a tall, slim Lombardi poplar leaning sadly away from the wind against a dark storm-sky. A silly impression, because there was nothing about her to give any such idea. She sat stiff and unmoving, her hands folded tightly in the lap of her dusty calico dress. She had large gray eyes and her face was work-worn. She stared straight ahead, taking no interest whatever in her surroundings. A blank-faced woman who had obviously been very beautiful at some previous time.

The man faced Ma and me with his hands on his hips and said, "The name is Clem Botford. Fresh up from Arkansaw." It was hardly an introduction, though; more like an enemy handing you

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his card and challenging you to a duel.

Ma said, "Land sakes, you must be the folks who bought Frank Marlin's place two miles beyond us up north. I'm Jane Struver and this is Lee Taylor, the ditchrider. Lee'll be seeing to your water."

"Bought Marlin's place right enough. Paid him a fat price, too." I got the idea he was waiting for an argument on the subject. When he didn't get it, he said, "Need a sack of oats for my team. Ran low on the last leg o' the trip."

I told him he could get oats down the street at Percy William's livery stable. He turned toward the wagon and said, "Pick up the meal we're a needin', Emily. And you younkers—you can get down and stand for a spell."

It was chilling to see the reaction. Nine dirty, ragged children got quietly out of the furniture-piled wagon and formed a loose line. There was no laughter, no excitement. Only eighteen somber eyes following the man down the street as he went to see about the oats. After he was gone, the children did exactly as he had told them—they stood.

The woman came gracefully down from the wagon seat and started into Plummer's store. But Ma intercepted her with an outstretched hand. "It's going to be mighty nice having new neighbors." She looked at the children and added, "My little Wanda'll certainly welcome so many little friends to play with." Wanda was crippled, her shriveled leg an ever-present pain in Ma's heart. Although it had been a birth-condition and no one's fault, Ma had taken the blame unto herself and lived with it constantly.

The woman looked at Ma with neither friendliness nor hostility. Possibly there was a mite of suspicion in the clear gray eyes. Finally she reached out awkwardly and gave Ma's hand two short pumps. "The name's Emily Botford, and I'm thankin' you kindly for the welcome." With that, she marched on into the store and I saw her eyes flick unconsciously down the street toward the livery stable.

She was soon out again, followed by Henry Plummer who had spotted the children. Henry, a genial old gentleman, had a grin on his face and a handful of vari-colored all-day suckers.

Botford returned and

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dumped a sack of oats into the wagon. He was angry. "Forty-five cents for a little smidgin' o' feed! And short weight, too, I'll vow. How much was the meal?"

"You owe the man twenty-five cents."

"Always rob a stranger, as the sayin' goes." Then Botford saw Henry Plummer and put real energy into his scowl. "Here now—what're you doin' there?"

Henry blinked. "Just a little candy for the young folks. No charge, mister—no charge at all."

"Take it back!"

"Eh?"

"I'm tellin' you—take every last bit o' the truck back. "You — younkers — turn it over!" Botford looked at Ma and me, as though hoping to be challenged. "We don't go for coddlin' younkers none. Candy and such truck gives 'em soft teeth—ruins their stummicks."

Henry Plummer took his candy and backed away in complete confusion. "Well," he said, "you've got a fine family there, anyhow."

"Raised 'em without coddlin', too," Botford said, handing him a quarter. "Had thirteen in all and only lost four in the raisin'. Pretty good average for a workin' man."

With that, he swung up onto the seat and started the rig up the north road. I'd have sworn he got pleasure out of making the children give that candy back, but I could have been wrong. After all, there are lots of parents who stand against giving children sweets. They claim it ruins their teeth and there might be some truth in that. If so, the Botford kids were all going to have strong molars—at least the ones who could stay alive long enough.

Ma's eyes were blazing. She looked after the departing wagon and said, "Well, today'll go down in history for me! First time I ever saw a man who'd take candy from a baby!"

I said, "Simmer down, Ma." I helped her into the Struver surrey—all two hundred pounds of her. "See you for coffee some night," I said, but I don't think she heard me. She looked at Botford's dust cloud and said, "I'll have to go real slow. The road'll be contaminated and I don't want my horse to get sick." I grinned at her and slapped the bay's rump and she headed out.

Botford wasn't the type of man I'd have sought out from

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choice, but my line of work took me to his place a couple of days later. I found him on the canal bank scowling at his headgate. He looked up and asked, "Is this the contraption I get water out'n?"

"That's why I dropped around," I told him.

"There's a padlock on the thing."

"Uh-huh. When you're ready for water, you leave an order in the tobacco box nailed to the 'gate there. I set the flow according to your order. Then I snap the padlock on again."

"Nothin' comes free out here, does it? Not even God-given water."

"I don't think God would object to the water company making a modest profit on their investment. You see, He didn't build the reservoirs or dig the canals. A little oversight on his part maybe."

"Their rates'll bear lookin' into, I'll vow."

"In any case, there's a well on your place for the house and the stock, so you won't be needing water until you seed. What are you aiming to put in?"

"Sugar beets."

"The whole forty?"

"Beets pay best. Why not?"

"No reason, I guess, except beets take more work than any other crop. They're planted in solid rows and have to be thinned to a single beet every six inches. Lots of backbreaking labor. That's why most farmers keep their beet acreage to a minimum."

"What do you think I got younkers for?"

"Pretty tough work for children—takes long hours."

"You tellin' me how to run my farm, mister?"

"Not at all—wouldn't think of it."

"My younkers're used to good hard work. Keeps 'em healthy and out o' mischief. Besides, when a man goes to the trouble and expense o' raisin' a family, they owe him somethin'—he's entitled to somethin' out'n 'em."

I couldn't frame any answer to that one that I dared put in words, so I pulled Joey around and rode on up the bank.

Ma Struver made the best coffee in that section, and most every night, when I came back along her side of the canal—Joey would swing down the road in the direction of the Struver place. And no matter how often I rode in, I knew I was always welcome.

I liked my work with the water company, and the peo-

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ple I met and made friends with. The land around there had been a farmstead proposition, so they all had one thing in common—a hunger for the soil; an itch to have something of their own that they could work at and live with and find solidly underneath them every morning when they got up. Something of their own, even if it was only an eight-by-twelve shack on a sage hill with only the barest necessities.

And they had a talent for hard work or they didn't stay long. The first ones who came had to grub out the sage, root by root; stoop down and pick up the lava rocks, one by one; no machinery was ever devised that would do either chore satisfactorily.

But after they'd broken their backs and calloused their hands, they had something, because the soil was the richest in the world; and with the blessed water trapped in the mountains and run down through the canals, that desert bloomed unbelievably. Wheat up to sixty bushels to the acre; potatoes your dog couldn't jump over—that is, if you had a small dog; Alfalfa you had to spend most of your time cutting and stacking. In fact there was hardly any crop that wouldn't thrive in that southern Idaho lava dust.

The Struvers had been one of the first families to arrive, and they'd assumed sort of an unofficial leadership, Ma particularly. She was a two-hundred-pound busybody with a heart so soft, she couldn't bear to see a broken-legged horse shot and put out of its misery.

She couldn't stand cruelty in any form, so naturally, her first question—after she'd poured me a cup of coffee that night—was, "What do you think of him, Lee?"

"Think of who?"

"You know very well! Clem Botford."

"Oh, a little tight-fisted, maybe. A mite hard."

"He's a plain, thoroughgoing brute!"

"Well, that's a way of putting it."

"But it's not his fault, of course," Ma said placidly. "It's her's."

"Come again?"

"I said it's her fault. He's a hard man all right. But how a husband treats his wife and family is up to the woman."

"Well, that's downright enlightening."

"It's always been that way. God gives a woman weapons to protect herself and her

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children with, but I guess Emily just doesn't know how to use them. She needs help."

"Now wait a minute, Ma. If you're fixing to butt in on private family affairs—"

There was a bright look in her eyes—a look I'd grown to know. She said, "Lee, did I ever tell you about that big Jersey cow we bought a few years back?"

"Can't say as you did."

"Big curving horns. Hadn't ever been with a herd before. Gentlest critter on four legs. Every cow in the herd, right down to the youngest heifer, just about bullyragged her to death."

"And what's this cow got to do with the Botfords?"

"Nothing, maybe, but I'll have a clearer idea come Sunday afternoon."

"Why Sunday?"

"I dropped out to their place this afternoon and invited Emily down for tea."

"Ma—I want to tell you something for your own good—stay out of the Botford's affairs. You may know women, but I know men, and that Clem Botford is dangerous. I've seen his cut before. If I'm not mistaken, they come from the feud country down there and he's—"

"He's exactly what she's allowed him to be. It's time some changes were made."

"Ma—so help me high heaven, I'm telling you—"

She patted my arm sweetly. "You just tend to your weirs and headgates and leave the important things to your betters."

Ma could make me real mad sometimes — but not mad enough to pass up a second cup of coffee. She poured it and I finished it off and went out to where Joey, impatient for his supper, was pawing the ground.

Ma had followed along and I said, "You didn't finish telling me about the Jersey."

"Oh, that—wasn't much to it. One day she hooked her horns into another cow while trying to get out of the way, simple as that."

"Horns help in a barnyard."

"I saw it, and don't anyone tell me a cow can't show expression. That Jersey looked around and said to herself: 'Land o' Goshen! I've been boss all the time and didn't know it!' "

"That's the way it is with a herd. Every cow knows her place; who she can lick; who she can't. But Ma—"

"Yes?"

"They're only cows—not human beings."

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"Well, like I said—I'll know more come Sunday—"

"She won't be here. He won't allow it."

"Want to make a small bet?"

"You know I'm not a gambling man."

"Oh, a little gambling never hurt anybody. How else would the railroads have gotten built?"

Joey was hungry and I didn't have time to argue. We headed for home.

I'd planned to lie around the following Sunday, and take it easy, but Joey got restless around noon and I remembered I'd forgotten to look at the Struver's splinted-up gelding. So I threw the saddle on Joey and we jogged north.

The gelding was doing fine. Luke had him slung up in his stall with a pulley around his front quarters and he was pretty proud of the job. "I'd have shot him," Luke said, "but Jane wouldn't have it. Said he'd pull through, and it's beginning to look like she was right."

We lounged around a while and talked crops and Luke took me down in the cellar where he had a crock of apple juice in right prime condition—that being his hobby.

But I watched the road and along about four o'clock there was Emily Botford marching along in our direction. She came with her head high, her eyes straight ahead, her hands folded in a clean white apron.

Luke went back to the barn and I managed to be on the front porch when Emily came up the path. Ma was there too. Ma said, "I'm so happy you could come, Emily. Now you get right in here out of that hot sun."

"I'm mighty obliged for the askin'."

I followed them in and Ma gave me a sour look. "Wouldn't you like to go help Luke with the gelding, Lee?"

"I was out there. The gelding's fine. I could use a cup of coffee."

"We ladies are having tea."

"Tea's fine." I sat down opposite Emily who was perched on the edge of Ma's best rocker, back straight as a poker, hands folded tightly in her lap.

Ma brought the tea and said, "Mighty hot weather we're having."

Emily said, "Clem's seedin' beets in the west field. Had no other way o' comin' so I walked."

"Luke will hitch up the surrey and drive you home."

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A touch of fear came into her eyes. "Thankin' you kindly, but I'll go as I come." Ma handed her some tea. She accepted it gravely. "Them's beautiful cups and sassers."

"We brought them from the east with us."

"I had some mighty fine cups. A salesman brought 'em clear up from Baton Rouge. A travelin' man. My pappy gave 'em to me for a marriage gift."

Ma put on a beaming smile. "It's a fine country out here, Emily. You're going to like it. A place where a man and a woman can work and share equal. Women are just as important as men out here."

"They was broke."

"A fine country to raise—"

"Tromped on the first month."

She was an interesting woman to watch; the gray eyes seemingly held continually in check by the stiffness of her features. It was almost as though she had trained herself to repress all emotion; to show neither joy nor sorrow; despair nor hope. And I was sure she'd practiced repression too long to change.

But later, I had to admit that I might have overjudged. I excused myself and went out in the backyard and carved a willow whistle for Wanda and then gave her a ride around the corral on Joey. When I got back to the front porch, Emily Botford was just leaving; and she *had* changed. Not much. Her back was just as straight; her head held just as high. But there was a bright, lively light in the gray eyes—as though they were winning out some over the set features. She was saying, "—and they's times when just the womenfolk get together all by theirselves to chat about things that interests them?"

"There certainly is," Ma assured her. "The North-End Women's Club and we meet right here at my place a week from tomorrow afternoon. We'll all be expecting you."

"I'm mighty beholden to you for the invitin'."

Ma took her hand and said, "Why, we're going to get on fine together, Emily—just fine," and Emily marched back up the road with her hands folded in the white apron, leaving Ma there to crow over me. She was as smug as a cat in new cream and she didn't waste any time. "Your trouble," she said, "is that you've got no faith in humankind. Why, she fair bloomed right out."

"I didn't see her smile."

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"All in good time. The woman has suffered, Lee. You were right about them coming from feud country down there. She's seen violence and hopelessness. This country's going to be like a breath of resurrection to her."

"I hope you're right, Ma, but I've got a hunch it isn't going to be that simple. There's still Clem Botford to be reckoned with."

"Oh, he'll swing around to our way of things as soon as Emily starts standing up to him a little. After all, he let her come today, didn't he?"

"Maybe he did—and maybe he didn't."

"You just hate to give in."

What with one thing and another, I didn't get back to the Struver place for quite a while. A new headgate washed out from poor setting on the other side of the canal and flooded a quarter-section. That lowered the crest below the break and I was pretty busy getting things straightened out.

So the next time I swung over for a late cup of coffee, the meeting of the women's club was over and I was in quite a sweat to hear how things had gone.

Ma told me—her spirits hanging somewhere around her shoe-tops. "You never saw such a change in a woman, Lee. Bright and interested and that guarded look on her face almost completely gone. I was patting myself on the back, thinking what it was going to mean to her and those children. I could just see her going home and standing up for her rights, knowing every woman in the section was behind her."

"But something happened?"

"He came."

It seemed that Clem Botford had waited until the meeting was in full swing. Then he drove over in his wagon and pulled up in front of the house and yelled. "Emily! Get yourself out here! And do the gettin' fast!"

Ma's soft little mouth drooped. "At the sound of that brute's voice all the spunk melted out of her like wax in the hot sun. Her eyes went dead and she stiffened as though she'd been hit. She got up and said, 'I'm mighty beholden to you for the nice time, but I'll have to be goin' now,' and she walked out like a zombie and got into the wagon beside him."

It had happened about as I'd expected but there was no satisfaction in it for me and I didn't feel like gloating.

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"You're dealing with a mighty rough man, Ma. I guess you know that, now."

There was a touch of horror in Ma's face at the recollection. "He sat out there in that wagon and sneered at me. He said, 'Don't think I been blind to the lolligaggin' that's been goin' on. My woman sneakin' off to waste time of an afternoon. You just quit tryin' to talk 'er into things—that's all I got to say.' "

"And you'd best do as he says, Ma."

"What makes a man like that, anyhow? A man that gets joy out of grinding a heel down on those that depend on him?"

"I read a book once that said it all has to do with some complex or other. A man has to have his ego bolstered, I think is the way the writer explained it. If he can't lay heavy on other people, he puts the heel down on those who can't help themselves. Makes him feel like a big man."

Ma was really drooping. "I don't think I ever failed at anything so miserably, Lee. It just takes the life out of a body."

"Charge it up to experience, Ma. And give that fellow a wide berth. Emily Botford's going to have to lie in her own bed. You can't do it for her."

I guess I'm kind of a busybody myself, because I made a point of swinging out past the Botford house on my next trip around. Emily was chopping wood as I rode up, and I saw blue welts on her arms just about where the hands of a big man would put them.

I said howdy and she straightened up and gave me that expressionless stare. "I'd be thankin' you if you'd take some words to Miz Struver for me."

"I'd be glad to."

"Tell her I won't be comin' to any more of them meetin's. And please thank her kindly for me."

"I'll do that, Mrs. Botford." I rode away and she went back to her chopping.

So that was how things were and how they stayed. I met Botford about a month later. He was at the headgate when I came along to turn on his first water. "Just want to see to it I get what I'm payin' for," he said by way of a greeting.

I got off of Joey and went about doing my job and when I straightened up from the headgate, there was a half-smile on his face. "Things is workin' out pretty good, the younkers is gettin' the hang o' this here beet thinnin'

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pretty good, so I won't have to hire me no help."

"That's fine." I'd seen the children moving down the long rows, doggedly swinging their choppers, getting the work done. I said, "Come harvest, the beets have to be topped. A beet knife's sharp and pretty heavy. A child can easy gash a leg."

"I'll think on that when it comes time—that is if the countryside'll keep their noses out and let me run my own affairs."

"I think you can bank on their doing that."

And I rode away thinking here was a man who'd rule or ruin. Or rather, rule *and* ruin. His kind didn't come along very often but when it did there was misery right to the end. That was how I figured it and I was sure I was right.

Until the day I was jogging along the banks and saw Emily Botford waving at me from her front step. I swung over into the yard and saw Emily's face. It was pale and set. "My six-year-old," she said. "My Nance. She's hot and breathin' fit to choke."

I got down and went inside. The child was hot all right. I could feel the wave of heat rising from her little body as I held out my hand. Her eyes were closed and she was either sleeping or groggy from the high fever. Her breath came in fighting gasps that tore at her thin chest.

Emily said, "It snuck up gradual. The tyke was coughin' some day 'fore yesterday. Then the fever come and the last three-four hours it's been bad."

"This child needs a doctor, Emily."

Her eyes pleaded. "You think that doctor I heard about up in town would drive out and give 'er somethin'?"

"I'll go in and get him myself. It will take about an hour if I can locate him quick. Do your best until then." I went out and got on Joey and cut him sharp until he was giving me all he had. And I wondered as I rode, why this hadn't happened before. Across the field, I could see the bulk of the children toiling in the beet fields. Only one down sick in that bunch, I thought, was a pretty good average. And I supposed Clem would figure so, too.

I pulled up at the Struver's long enough to give Ma the picture, and as I rode away, she was lumbering toward the barn to hook up the surrey. Ma had a way with ailing things—human or otherwise

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—that would stand this situation in good stead.

I found Doc Abrams in his office. He said, "I'll go—of course—but I don't know these people at all. I'd appreciate it if you'd ride along with me."

Doc was an old, experienced general practitioner and ranged in a pretty wide circle. He had a pair of fast bays that clipped along in front of a light buggy and there was no horseflesh in the country around that could dust their noses.

On the way out, he said, "I've heard a few things about this Clem Botford."

"A kind of tough customer, but I didn't see him around. Guess he's off some place."

We made good time getting there and found Ma holding Nance in her arms with Emily Botford wringing out cold cloths. Doc Abrams made a quick examination and said, "I believe in putting it straight. It will be touch and go with this child. She has pneumonia and she's got to be taken to the hospital where she can get better treatment. Get ready quickly—please, Mrs. Botford."

What happened next is a little hard to retrace, it came so fast. Doc Abrams wrapped Nance in a blanket and went out of the house toward the buggy. Ma and I followed. Doc Abrams almost got there when a harsh voice stopped him in his tracks: "Where you goin' with that younker, mister?" And Clem Botford came around Doc's rig, heading up from the barn.

Doc said, "We're taking the child to the hospital. She's very ill."

"You ain't takin' her no place. We don't go for coddlin' our younkers any time they get an ache or pain."

"But good Lord, man—!"

"They come out better if they're left to fight off stummick aches and such by theirselves. Take 'er back to the house."

Doc Abram's face reddened. "I don't think you realize—"

"Then I'll take 'er myself!" Clem extended his arms and took a step forward. But only one step because, at that moment, another voice cut in:

"Stand where you are, Clem."

We turned to look and it will be a long time before I forget what we saw—a double-barreled shotgun pushed out the window, resting on the sill, with Emily Botford manning the far end.

Botford scowled and stop-

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ped with one foot in the air. Emily said, "Nary another step. Clem. Not a single one." Her voice was quiet—a low, stark voice—but it was given a lot of added weight by the click of two hammers being drawn back. Clem Botford put his foot down and turned to face his wife.

Her lips were a stiff line that bent when she spoke and even though the gun didn't waver, the fear was again in her eyes. But a fear now tempered with something else; the look of a female cougar backed into a fence.

Botford's face was heavy and dark. "Put that gun down, Emily! You gone daft?"

She didn't answer. Her eyes, on Botford, took a strange, fixed stare. His scowl faded into perplexity. His throat worked. He said, "Emily—you a crossin' me?" Amazement in the tone.

Still she had no reply. Ma Struver was standing close to me—touching my arm with her hand—and when she shivered, I realized something tight and strange had come into the air. A storm ready to smash out under a clear blue sky. Electricity in the air.

It was all centered in Emily Botford's great gray eyes—eyes terrible now, with an intensity I could feel. They held dead on her husband's face and they talked to him silently—lashed and scored him with a silent ferocity as they spoke of things those two alone could know. Clem's fists doubled. He said, "Of all the crazy—"

The stiff lips bent. "I'm speakin' up, Clem. It must sound passin' strange, 'cause I never done it before. Not back there. I guess 'cause all my life I was hemmed in by big trees and big hates and big meanness by things that went on back there in the feud country—where no woman ever spoke up to her man." She stopped, knifing him coldly with her eyes, then went on. "I mind me o' four little graves back there. You mind 'em Clem? Down under the old sycamore. To you, they was only filled with some kind of averages, I guess, but not to me. Every time you dug one I died a little until I thought all the heart had gone out'n me and nothin' much mattered any more."

Ma's fingernails were cutting into my wrist. Doc Abrams stood frozen. Botford gulped and asked, "What you a drivin' at?"

"Just this. Four little

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graves, and now you'd best let Nance go to that there hospital and get her chance to live, 'cause if you're fixin' to start another string out here in Idaho—as God's my judge, Clem Botford, you're goin' to fill the first one."

I looked at Botford and saw a man who knew he was a scant inch from death; who'd strode booted and hobnailed down the years and found that the trail ended in the two eyes of a double-barreled shotgun. And so close to the end he'd come, that now the wrong motion of a hand or a foot would send him kiting off this earth. There was cold sweat all over me and for a wild moment, I wondered what a man looked like blown in two at his belt buckle.

Then Botford, so white even his tan seemed to be gone, turned around very slowly. He took six careful, measured steps and sat down on a lava rock with his back to the gun and put his face in his hands. Finally he found something to say. "All right, Doc," he croaked. "Take the younker."

That released us. Ma swept little Nance out of Doc Abrams' arms and I helped her into the buggy. She bent down and hissed. "You come along. We aren't wanted here." I got in and the three of us drove away. When I looked back, Botford was still sitting on the rock; the gun was still pointed at his spine.

Our hospital was in Winton, about fifteen miles away, and I waited at the Struver's until Doc Abrams brought Ma back. She was still shaken, but she managed a thin smile.

I said, "Well, Ma. You were plumb right. God gives women weapons to protect their young. Looks like he furnished Emily Botford with a double-barreled shotgun."

"Land o' Goshen, Lee!" Ma said, dropping weakly down on the front steps. "You know there was something I forgot—about that Jersey cow."

"What was that?"

"After she found out how things were, she took out after a Herford we had and left the poor critter fit for nothing but the butcher. We had to saw off the Jersey's horns and keep her in a stall 'til she cooled down."

"Nice time to remember that."

"I wonder how they'll make out now."

About two months later, after little Nance was brought home, I was in on a little scene that answered Ma's

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question. I'd dropped into Henry Plummer's store to buy a new cinch for Joey's saddle when in marched Emily Botford with nine clean, ragged youngsters behind her and Clem Botford bringing up the rear. She walked to the counter and said, "We'd be pleased to look through your stock o' child's pants and dresses and such."

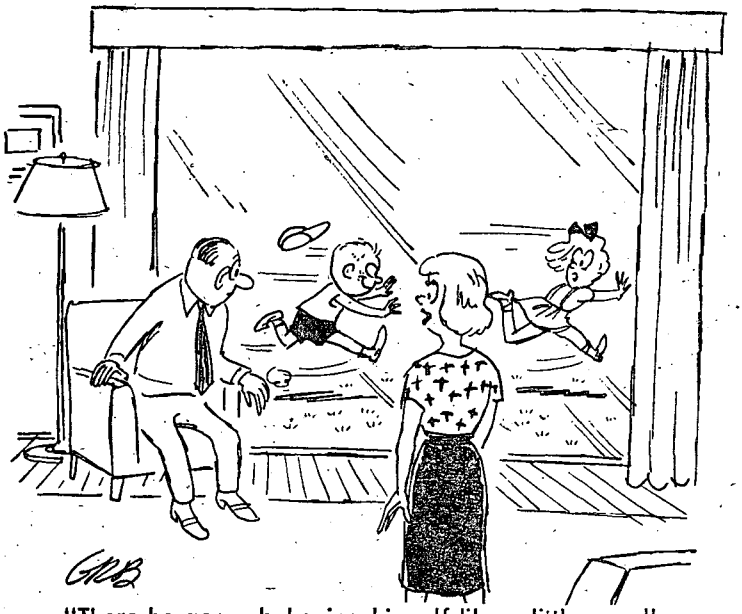
Henry took them to the rear. A few minutes passed, then out they marched—as bright as nine new pins of assorted lengths. Botford, still looking like a hawk—but one with its wings clipped, a little, maybe—stepped up and paid. After which Emily put her eyes on him and said, "All right, Clem."

He gulped and steeled up to it and said, "Them candy things you offered our younkers when we came. We'd be acceptin' 'em now, if you're still of a mind—and thankin' you kindly."

Then, for the first time, I saw Emily Botford's expression change. She smiled.

And back came that silly first impression I'd gotten of her. But without the wind or the storm clouds. Just a slim, graceful Lombardi pointing straight up—into the sun.

THE END



"There he goes—behaving himself like a little man."

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LET'S REPEAL LOVE

By LEE SABER

ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

We're not going to, really, so tear up that letter to your congressman. But you'll have to admit — after reading this science-fiction yarn — that it would be a sure-fire invasion plan. So let's hope the Martians don't think of it.

IT HAD been a solid two months since Adam had first met Doona Dickenson, and made the usual resolve to show her his painting.

The portrait had been placed strategically on the wall opposite Adam's bed, a Goya-type nude that might have been titled "Passion's Plaything," or something equally fulsome and casually obscene.

She was worth the effort, of course. Adam took the business of being a roué seriously, and it was after much deliberation that he qualified Doona as the loveliest girl he had ever had the opportunity of victimizing. The raven's wing had nothing on the blackness of Doona's silky hair. The look in her large violet eyes hit you like the kick of old brandy. And as for the rest of her—

Adam moaned, and poured himself some more coffee. It was cold, and the ash of his cigarette had dropped little white flakes on the surface.

He blamed himself, of course. Until last night, Doona hadn't permitted more than a 65° degree kiss. But last night, with the rain drumming against his window, with a Chopin etude on the hi-fi, with a cognac being warmed between her soft hands, she had given Adam that misty-eyed glance, that tender arch of shoulder against chest, that slight purring accent to her speech which Adam, the expert, had clearly recognized as the symptoms of surrender.

He dropped the rest of the cigarette into his coffee.

"Phooey!" he said aloud.

He was disgusted. He was angry. He was mortified. For after all the skirmishes, and with victory in sight, Adam had committed the unpardonable blunder.

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He just hadn't *felt* like it.

Even now, he couldn't explain it. Even now, he didn't know why his only reaction to the misty-eyed glance, arched shoulder, and purring speech was a sleepy yawn and a suggestion that they watch the late movie on Adam's television set.

That was all that was required to break the spell and set him back a solid two months in the case of Bailey vs. Dickenson. They had watched the late movie, and Doona had gone home—unaccompanied, and untouched.

He reached over and flicked off the newsprinter as it finished a squib about a proposed diplomatic visit from the Martian proconsul. Then he went into the bedroom to dress, with one contemptuous look at the overblown nude on his wall.

He was ready to face the day in half an hour. Adam had a kind of wan good looks which encouraged the coddling instinct in women, and the morning's hangover added to the forlorn, Lord Byron quality of his features. In the elevator descending towards the street of his apartment house, he met Mrs. Ritter, the platinum-haired widow from the fourth floor. She gave him her customary unspoken invi-

Sorting out the women in

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Adam's mind could have kept a psychiatrist busy for a long time.

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tation, but he merely yawned.

He was still troubled when he reached the offices of OBC, the television network which employed him as a script editor. He had a vague feeling of discontent when he slipped behind his desk, and it took a while for him to determine the cause. Then he knew. It was Sally, the office receptionist, the girl whom he had dubbed God's Gift to the Sweater Industry. He had breezed right by Sally's desk, without a single glance her way—a glance that was as traditional as his morning coffee break. It was incredible. It was alarming.

But Adam Bailey simply didn't care.

He tried to lose himself in work, but the problem kept intruding. Was something terribly Freudian happening to him?

Around eleven, he received a phone call from Irma Gladstone, a vigorous blonde from the chorus line of *That's All, Brother,* the current smash musical about racy doings in a monastery.

"Adam, honey?"

"Yes, Irma."

"It's been *ages,* honey. When are we getting together?"

"Well, I've been awfully busy, Irma. Working late every night—terribly busy."

"I haven't heard any really *good* Chopin in weeks."

"Really? Suppose I send you a recording?"

Click!

At noontime, he passed up a lunch date with Gerry Germaine, a young TV starlet of promising ability (36-26-34). Instead, he ate a lonely, tasteless lunch in a grimy cafe, pausing only to purchase the latest edition of *Growl,* the Man's Magazine. He was distressed to find that *Growl*'s most appetizing cheesecake photos couldn't break the spell. It might as well have been the *Boot & Shoe Recorder,* for all the tittilation he found in its pages.

Now he knew it was serious. On his return to the office, Adam checked his address book, and dialed Dr. Misercordia.

He was lucky. One of the doctor's patients, a woman who collected pomeranians, had been forced to cancel her afternoon appointment.

An hour later, Adam was on the couch.

"It's like this," he said. "For the last week or so, I—well, I haven't been normal."

"And what do you mean by normal?" The doctor, a jolly man with a finely-landscaped moustache, leaned forward.

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"I think it started Wednesday, but I can't swear to it. I was out with one of the loveliest girls I've met in my life. She's a kind of a tough customer, too. You know the type—marriage or nothing. Electra complex, I'd guess."

"Please," Dr. Misercordia said. "I'll do the analyzing."

"Sure. Well, I was out with Doona—that's her name—and making the usual pass. Only my heart wasn't in it, Doctor. I could tell. I didn't really care whether she gave in or went home."

"Were you tired? Physically or mentally?"

"No."

"Does this girl, perhaps, bear any resemblance to a sister, or your mother?"

"Not at all."

"Go on."

"Anyway, I saw Doona on Thursday, too, and had exactly the same reaction. The same thing happened on Friday and Saturday. Then Sunday night, things really got bad. She started to give in."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, I could tell she was —ready. We were at my apartment, and you remember what a lousy night it was. Rainy, cold. The atmosphere was just right. Only when the time came for me to *do* something about it, I just yawned and turned on the TV. I'd lost interest completely."

"Has this happened to you before?"

"Never!"

"Do you have the same reaction to all women?"

"All of 'em. So help me, Doctor, if the most beautiful dame in the world came crawling in here on her hands and knees . . ."

"Yes," Dr. Misercordia said vaguely, and Adam turned to look at him. He was tugging at his moustache and staring at the floor.

"Something wrong?"

"No, no. I was just thinking about something. You see, this may be a perfectly normal reaction, Mr. Bailey. Many men can lose interest in sex at certain times. But it's something of a—coincidence."

"What does that mean?"

The doctor frowned. "Well, to be completely honest, I've noticed a similar occurrence in myself."

"You do?"

"Yes. Right now, and for the past week. It may be something to do with the weather, or some other disturbance."

Adam looked at him with interest. He rose from the couch and went over to the

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doctor's chair. "How do you know it's happened to you?" he asked.

Dr. Misercordia stood up and paced the floor. "I'm not really sure. But you see, Greta and I have a sort of understanding about Saturday nights. For twenty years, too. But *this* Saturday—"

Adam clucked sympathetically. "I see. it must be especially difficult for a married man."

"Yes, it is," the doctor said thoughtfully. He sat on the couch and clenched his hands between his knees. "Greta became suspicious almost immediately. Accused me of philandering, as a matter of fact. Very irrational woman, my wife."

"I know what you mean. Women are peculiar."

"Very," Dr. Misercordia said, lying down. "I told her that I was tired, but she didn't think that was the reason. Ridiculous to accuse me. Never looked at another woman. Well, looked perhaps. But right now—I couldn't care less about *any* woman."

"Describe your symptoms," Adam said, taking the chair.

That evening, Adam settled in for a night of cozy solitude. But at nine o'clock, the door buzzer changed things. He answered it warily, fearing female intrusion. But the visitor was a stocky, scowling male.

He stomped into the room wordlessly, tossing his hat on the sofa and joining it there a second later. His name was Gary Nugent, a feature writer for a New York newspaper, and a bosom buddy of long standing. Adam had celebrated the occasion of his wedding only two weeks before.

"Well!" Adam said. When his friend failed to answer, he said: "Well?"

"Babs left me," Gary announced.

"What?"

"She left me!"

"What are you talking about? For Pete's sake, you two should still be in the bill and coo stage. What'd you do? Kick her mother? You couldn't have had a serious life."

"She walked out on me this morning," the young man said gloomily. "Maybe I can't blame her—"

"Look, friend, let's have some facts. Barbara's not the type to kiss you good-bye without a reason. What's the crime?"

Gary shrugged. "How should I know? It's not my fault, is it? I mean, a guy doesn't *have* to act like Romeo

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every five minutes. I mean, does he?"

"You want a drink?"

"A double!"

When half of the amber stuff was out of his glass, Gary relaxed and began talking.

"I don't know what happened, Adam. So help me I don't. The first week was great. I mean *great*. We were up in the Poconos, and it couldn't have been better. The Poconos were nice, too. Only after we got back last week, I sort of—well, sort of lost interest."

"Lost interest in what?" Adam said, feeling a small chill start at the back of his neck.

"You know what. Of all people, you know what. Goya!" he said with a snort.

"Let me get you straight. You mean the old urge was gone?"

"Phfft. Out the window: Last night was the payoff, I guess. Babs comes in wearing one of those peekaboo nightgowns. Said she bought it that afternoon. For all I cared, it could have been a potato sack."

Adam pulled up his chair. "Look," he said intensely. "This is very important. Exactly when did this indifference start?"

"I dunno," the stocky young man said miserably. "Sometime last week. I don't know *why* it happened." His eyes widened, and he balled up a fist threateningly. "Look, lover boy, if you dare tell anyone about this—"

Adam laughed hollowly. "Who, me? Say, listen, pal. I'd be the last guy in the world. The same damn thing's happened to *me*."

"What?"

"You heard me. I even went back to the analyst today. And damned if he didn't make the same confession. It must be the weather, or sunspots. Maybe some kind of infection, an epidemic—"

"Never heard of an epidemic like *that*," Gary said.

"Neither did I. But it's too much of a coincidence."

Gary downed the rest of his drink. "Think I ought to see a doctor?"

"Go ahead. I wish you better luck than I had. I'm just hoping it goes away in a few days. Maybe it's no worse than a bad cold."

"Yeah," Gary said hopefully.

But it didn't pass. For two solid weeks, not a single female visitor crossed the threshold of Adam Bailey's apartment, and his continence

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was the talk of the neighborhood.

Doona Dickenson finally relented some of her stern principles, and telephoned him. When he responded coldly, she was baffled. A few days later, she phoned again, with much the same result. At the end of the second week, she threw principle to the wind, and came to Adam's apartment.

He allowed her in, but reluctantly.

She took a seat and crossed a superb pair of legs, watching him with smoldering violet eyes.

"All right," she said. "Let's have it, Adam."

"Have what?" he said innocently.

"What have I done? Scared you off?"

"Why, Doona. What gives you that idea?"

"This hard-to-get stuff has been going on too long. I began to think you were really miffed at me. I'd like to know why, Adam."

She was a lovely, feminine thing, but for the first time, Adam examined her with unbiased, de-sexed eyes, and saw the hard-headed, practical woman beneath the skillful makeup.

"I can't explain it," he said uncomfortably. "It's nothing to do with *you*, Doona. It's all my problem."

"What is?"

"I don't want to talk about it."

"It's not another woman, though," Doona said. "I know that."

"How come?"

"Look at this place. Pigs live in penthouses compared to this. If any *woman* had been here, she would have done *something* about the mess. So, you see it obviously isn't that."

Adam looked guiltily around the apartment. It was true. Without his usual parade of pretties, always as eager to straighten up as they were to—

"Look," the girl said flatly, "if there's something wrong I want to hear about it. Don't forget—*I have* a two-month investment in you, too."

He swallowed. "All right, then. I'll tell you what's happened. Only don't blame me if it sounds crazy."

When he was through talking, Doona said:

"That's crazy!"

"I know it is! The only explanation I can think of is that there's some sort of epidemic."

"Just because three men have the same trouble?" she

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cocked a pretty eyebrow. "I'd need more proof than that."

"But I *can* prove it. I mean, I could, if—"

"If what?"

Adam's eyes gleamed. "Look, Doona. Would you be willing to help? In an experiment?"

"What would I have to do?"

"Nothing. I mean, nothing much. Just go out with me, tonight. Wear something, you know, sexy. And then see what kind of reaction you get from men."

"I *know* that," the girl said stiffly.

"But you don't. I tell you, something's happened! Men aren't what they used to be!"

She looked at him incredulously.

"All right," she said briskly. "Wait for me here. I'll be back in half an hour."

When she returned, her wardrobe reflected the earnestness with which she had accepted Adam's instructions. She wore a black silken blouse whose straps slipped over both white shoulders, and with a decolletage that was close to being against the law. Just to make things worse, two of the four buttons were missing. Her tight-fitting gray skirt was slit two feet up the side. Her sleek black hair was swept back, and her mouth was as red as a stop light.

"Ready?" she said.

"Ready," Adam said gloomily, cursing his infliction.

It was a warm evening, and they strolled along the bright streets of midtown New York until Adam spotted a suitable bar. It was called Hatton's, and Adam knew it well.

Hatton's motif was Martian, evidence of a decorating fad that swept the country shortly after the establishment of diplomatic relations with the red planet. Prismatic Martian mirrors hung on the wall, reflecting the true images of the patrons lined two-deep at the bar—all of them men. Martian permalamps shed soft, faintly blue light. Placards advertised a formidable list of Martian potations, each one guaranteed to knock you off your orbit.

Adam looked over the night's customers. They were, on the average, a youngish, lusty group.

"I'll take a table," he whispered to Doona. "You go up to the bar and do your stuff. If you get into any trouble, I'll be right behind you."

Doona nodded. She patted the smooth black hair on the back of her head, and made

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her way towards the thickest part of the crowd. With subtle movements of her body, she edged her way to the rail.

"Scotch Rocket," she said to the barman, and turned lowered lashes on the two men who flanked her. They looked back, smiled politely, and continued their conversation.

Doona frowned in exasperation. Adam saw her shift her body again, until her hip made contact with one of the men. He said: "Excuse me," and shifted away.

She sipped the drink that arrived, and then became aggressive. Adam saw her say something in a low voice to one of the men, who merely shrugged. She turned to the other one, who inched away.

He could see that Doona was becoming annoyed. It was a personal challenge.

She moved away from the group and went to the nearest table. She lifted one leg to the chair and began to straighten the seam of her stocking. It was just the sort of action that was downright dangerous in a place like this.

But there was no danger tonight.

They left the bar shortly afterwards, and Doona was muttering to herself. "It can't be true. It just can't—"

"But it is," Adam told her. "Something awful's happened. This is a critical situation."

They walked across town on 52nd Street, and Adam got an inspiration. He paused to chat with the splendidly-costumed doormen who strolled in front of the girlie joints that dotted the street. When his canvas was completed, his face was longer than ever.

"What is it?" Doona said. "What's wrong?"

"Business," Adam answered. "There isn't any. Not one of the joints has a customer. The doormen say it's been going on for days."

"What's so terrible?" she said primly. "I think these places are perfectly terrible."

"That's not the point."

They returned to Adam's apartment, and split a bottle of bourbon between them.

Around the fourth drink, Adam suddenly looked like a man with a discovery.

"What is it?" Doona said.

"I just realized something. If it's really true—if it isn't just a passing phase—then it's the end!"

"The end of what?"

"If men don't want women, that means no more children. And that means no more human race!"

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"Adam! Now you're being silly."

"Am I?" he said.

An hour later, the bourbon took effect. Adam slumped down on the sofa and went to sleep. Doona came to his side, and kissed his earlobe. Then she whispered something to him.

He said: "Phooey."

She burst into tears and left the apartment.

Adam had lunch with Gary Nugent the next day. His first question surprised the newspaperman.

"Where can I find a house of—ah, ill-repute?"

Gary looked shocked. "Are you kidding?"

"I'm dead serious," Adam said, and looked it. "You newspaper guys have contacts. I'm sure you can give me some leads. All I need is one good address. That should not be asking too much."

"Since when do you go in for pro stuff?"

"Cut it out. I still feel the same way about dames. Don't you?"

"Yeah," Gary admitted. "And unless things change, Babs won't come back home."

"Do you want her back?"

"Sure. I like her."

"But do you *love* her?"

Gary chewed his food like a mournful cow. "Well, what's the pitch? Why do you want a bawdy house?"

"I want to investigate. I can't really *prove* what's happened. Except for Dr. Misercordia, and yourself, I haven't been able to get a single guy to confess that he's been desexed. They're all afraid to admit it."

"So what's your plan?"

"I'm going to pay a call on a professional joint. If this thing is really widespread, their business should have ground to a halt. Makes sense, doesn't it?"

"Well," Gary said, thinking hard, "only place comes to mind is a place on Villiers Avenue, run by a dame named Mrs. Eleanor Van Culkins. Very ritzy joint, high-class talent, plenty of protection. Will that do?"

"Sounds fine. Give me the address."

Gary wrote it out for him, and they finished their lunch in melancholy silence. Both were equally disturbed.

Villiers Avenue was a tree-shaded street whose brownstone houses were in a fine state of preservation. In the center of the block, Adam made his way up the stoop of the house he was looking for, and paused to listen to the faint strains of a Rossini

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opera emerging from behind the shuttered windows.

He pressed the buzzer, and a uniformed maid answered.

"How do," he said. "I wonder if I might see Mrs. Van Culkins?"

"Whom," the girl said precisely, and with the slightest wriggle of her hip, "shall I say is calling?"

"Mr. Bailey."

He was shown into the living room, or salon, or whatever such area was designated in establishments of this nature. It was fairly impressive, with tastefully chosen furnishings. It might have been a Bostonian living room of the early nineteen hundreds, and this impression was furthered when Mrs. Van Culkins entered.

She was a tall, stately woman in a flowing evening gown, her wrists and throat flashing jewelry. Her air of dignity and decorum was compelling, and she greeted Adam as if he was a beloved curate come to tea.

"Mr. Bailey!" she said. "How nice to see you."

"Er, how do you do. I hope you don't mind this intrusion—"

"Intrusion?" She laughed throatily and dabbed at her cheek with a bit of lace. "My dear, we are always delighted to see gentlemen."

"Well," Adam said, "to tell you the truth, I've merely come for some information."

Her face froze. "Oh?"

"Nothing serious," Adam said hastily. "I'm making a sort of survey, about business conditions in the city. I'll be happy to pay you for your time."

"*My* time?"

"I just wanted an appraisal from you. Whether you've had many—patrons lately. I'll be glad to pay you, say, twenty dollars for the information."

She looked at him suspiciously for a moment, and then her face softened. "That is easy," she said, with a brassy laugh, shedding some of the Bostonian dignity. "We haven't had a customer in over a week."

"Not a single one?"

"I simply can't understand it. We've always done a thriving business, Mr. Bailey. You see, we try and create an atmosphere of pleasure and refinement . . ."

"How many—hostesses do you have?"

"Seven. All the loveliest, most charming ladies. I did have nine, but two of them have left. If it wasn't for Wanderlee, I could barely manage to pay the rent—"

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"Wanderlee? What's that?"

"It's one of our young ladies. A perfectly beautiful Martian girl. You see, we cater to a very selective clientele, and many are quite intrigued with Martian ladies. Wanderlee has always been one of our most successful hostesses."

"I see. And you say Wanderlee has been—operative?"

"She is the only one, I'm afraid. She has a special friend, from the Embassy. A perfectly lovely Martian gentleman, who has been most kind. I do think Martians are charming, don't you? I have never felt the slightest revulsion for them, not like some people. Live and let live is my motto." She dabbed at her lips with the lace.

"And this Martian fellow. He's been coming here since business started to decline?"

"Oh, yes. Thank goodness for that. He's very regular."

Adam chewed his lip thoughtfully. "That's strange, isn't it? I mean, that business should stop the way it has. Yet this one Martian keeps calling."

"Not strange at all," Mrs. Van Culkins said. "I gather from what my other professional friends tell me, they're literally *surviving* on their Martian business. Thank heavens I had the sense to take on Wanderlee!"

Adam was startled. "Then the Martians are still—" He stopped as someone entered the room. It was a pneumatic young woman in a sheer yellow gown, who stared at him somewhat wistfully.

"Come in my dear," Mrs. Van Culkins said gaily. "This is Mr. Bailey. Mr. Bailey, this is Marilyn."

"How do," Adam said. "Well, I guess I better run along."

"Marilyn is one of our *favorites*," Mrs. Van Culkins said.

"Yes," Adam said. He slid a twenty out of his wallet and handed it to the woman. "Well, thank you very much, Mrs. Van Culkins. I believe I have everything I want."

He went to the door. Behind him, Mrs. Van Culkins said something very much like: "Damn!"

He was halfway down Villiers Avenue when he saw the unusually tall figure heading for the establishment. The man was hatless, and the light from the street lamp fell harshly on his polished naked skull. He was walking rapidly, but Adam obtained a good look at his faintly-blue face, and realized that he had en-

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countered Wanderlee's faithful Martian caller. He looked back after him, watching until he entered the house.

"I just don't get it," Adam said to himself.

"I don't get it either," Gary Nugent said. He had been summoned urgently to Adam's apartment the next evening.

"There must be an answer," Adam said. "Whatever's been bothering us, it's not bothering the Martians. They're immune to whatever it is."

"That's possible, of course. I mean, Martians don't get colds, or hay fever, or half a dozen other Earth diseases. If it's really some kind of infection—"

Adam went to the window and stared out reflectively.

"That's what I've been wondering about, Gary. What if it isn't an infection. What if it's some kind of—plot?"

Gary blinked. "What are you talking about?"

"Oh, I know it sounds nutty. Nobody believes in this Martian invader junk any more."

"Of course not," Gary frowned. "We've had wonderful diplomatic relations with the Martians for twenty years."

"Sure, sure. Only the way I figure it—"

"Look, boy, you've been reading too much. The Martians are the best thing that's happened to this world in a century. They've pushed scientific progress ahead five generations. They've given us more damned advances than we could have hoped for in a thousand years of trying. I mean, look at the water-purification process, and the permalamp, and the trueview mirror, and the soil regenerator, and all those other things. Hell, if they were antagonistic, they wouldn't have helped us so much."

"I know all that—"

"Then don't talk so stupid."

"But you don't see what I mean. What if they weren't so friendly? What if they wanted to move in and take over? After all, it's a hell of a life they have to lead on Mars. They've *got* to have things like the water-purifier, and the soil regenerator and stuff. They can't produce a quarter of the food we can. Their life span on Mars is half of what ours is on Earth. This is a nice, rich, green planet, and they'd give their eyeteeth for it, wouldn't they?"

"Nuts," Gary said.

"Give me a chance," Adam answered heatedly. "Sure, I know we ship them food and

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stuff. But wouldn't it be a lot better if they didn't have to depend on interplanetary trade? If they could simply own the source of supply?"

"But they're not warlike, Adam. You know they're not. They never even conceived of such a thing as an army. They never had a war. They don't know one weapon from another. They're just not the invader type."

"All right. But what if they could invade without firing a shot? What if they could take over the planet without a single military action?"

"What do you mean?"

"Sex," Adam said.

"What?"

"Sex, for Pete's sake! If they could kill the male sex instinct, they'd be killing off every unborn generation. Wouldn't they? If this goes on, there just won't be any kids born ten months from now. There won't be any kids ever! So we'll all grow old and crochety and die. And there won't be any little Baileys or Nugents to carry on for us. Will there?"

"You're drunk," Gary said, frowning at the bourbon in Adam's hand. "This thing'll pass—"

"But what if it doesn't? Can you see the end of it?"

He had managed to make his friend look worried.

"Yeah," he said unhappily. "I can see it all right. Babs will never come home to me."

"And Babs will never have kids!" Adam said fiercely. "I tell you, Gary, we got to *warn* somebody!"

Gary yawned. "Okay, Orson. You sound the alarm. I'm going home to bed. . . ."

When his friend left the apartment, Adam sat in the darkening room and broke the back of a bourbon bottle.

Then he had an idea. He picked up the telephone and dialed information. Then he placed his call.

"Mrs. Van Culkins residence," the maid said.

"May I speak to Mrs. Van Culkins, please?"

A pause. "Hello?"

"Mrs. Van Culkins, my name is Adam Bailey. I visited your—I saw you last night. You remember, the survey."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Bailey."

"I was just wondering, about that Martian girl."

"You mean Wanderlee?"

"Yes. I wonder if you permit her any—outside engagements?"

"Normally, no. However, with the situation the way it is—" She coughed delicately. "Of course, there will be an

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extra charge for off-the-premise services."

"I understand. I wonder if you can send Wanderlee to my apartment, tonight. The address is 350 Central Park West, Apartment 30-B."

"Very well. However, I'm afraid it won't be for at least another hour. Mr. Ai is visiting her at the moment."

"Who?"

"That nice Martian gentleman I told you about."

"Oh. Well, send her around as soon as you can. I'd like to talk to her."

Mrs. Van Culkins laughed gaily. "Certainly. You'll find her a delightful conversationalist."

Adam hung up, and returned to the bottle.

It was then nine o'clock. At a quarter of twelve, the door buzzer startled him out of a reverie.

He went hurriedly to answer it. The hallway outside his apartment was in total darkness, and the dim outline of the figure framed in the doorway was much too tall and broad to be Mrs. Culkin's alien hostess. It struck Adam suddenly that the figure seemed menacing, and an instinct told him to step backwards into the room. As he did, he saw the swift gleam of something metallic.

Then the shot was fired, and Adam cried out.

Adam found himself looking into the unfriendliest face he had seen in a long time. It was as wide as it was long, and the eyes were buried under an overhanging brow of massive proportions. The slitted mouth seemed to be chewing on three cigars at once.

"Okay, pal," the man said gruffly. "Who was she?"

"Who was what?" Adam looked around and discovered that he was still in his own apartment. After a while, he realized that his right arm was numbed by a tight bandage.

"Don't give me that. You got quite a rep in this building. And I just happened to find these."

He lifted a batch of glossy photos in his hand. They comprised a superb collection of attractive women, all of whom had been indiscreet enough to ink passionate inscriptions across the base of their respective portraits.

Adam groaned and sat up. "I don't know what you're talking about. Who the hell are you?"

"Inspector Dutch, Fourth Precinct. Somebody reported gunfire. We traced it here. You want to tell me about it?"

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"Am I hurt?"

"Barely scratched. Your girl friend has lousy aim."

"It wasn't a girl friend! So help me. I think it was—a Martian."

"What?" Inspector Dutch plucked the shifting cigar out of his teeth. "Say, listen, pal—"

"I tell you it was a Martian! I went to answer the door, and the hallway was dark. He must have unscrewed the bulb. I couldn't make out his face, and the next thing I knew—"

"If you couldn't make out his face, how do you know *what* he was?"

"He was bald. And his skin—"

"What about his skin? Was it blue?"

"I guess I don't know," Adam said miserably.

Inspector Dutch riffled through the photos without interest. "Look, Mr. Bailey. I know you think you're being gentleman-like about this. Only let's have the facts. You get a lot of female callers, don't you?"

"Not any more."

The man looked surprised for a moment, but then reset his face into an expression of official grimness. "We got ways of checking, you know. Better give me her name."

"It *wasn't* any woman. I was expecting a woman, but she never showed up. *He* came instead. He came to kill me."

"Who?"

"I think his name is Mr. Ai."

Inspector Dutch sighed. "Look, pal, I've been a cop for almost thirty years. The Martians have been around for twenty, and I never yet booked one of those blue boys. They just don't commit crimes. You oughta know that."

"This one did."

"But why? What did he have against you?"

"I don't know for sure. Maybe it's because I was seeing his girl. But she's a professional—anyone with the price can see her. I think it goes deeper than that—"

"What's the dame's name?"

"Wanderlee. I've never even met her. I called her up at her—home, and arranged for her to come over. That was at ten o'clock. At about a quarter of twelve, the door buzzer went off. I answered it, and boom. That's all I can tell you."

"That's not enough. You think I'm going back to the station and report the first Martian crime in twenty

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years? You're nuts, pal. You'll have to do better than that."

"All right," Adam said bitterly. "I'll do better. I'll tell you the whole story. Maybe you'll believe it, maybe you won't. But it's about time we *did* something."

He started talking. He talked about Doona Dickerson, and Dr. Misercordia, and Gary Nugent. He talked about his experiment in Hatton's Bar, and his interview with the 52nd Street doormen, and his visit to Mrs. Van Culkin's establishment. By the time he had finished talking, Inspector Dutch's cigar was a short black stub.

"Well?" Adam said at the conclusion.

"Well, what?"

"Do you believe any of this? Have you noticed anything about yourself?"

The wide face flushed. "Look, pal, I'm sixty-two years old. I don't expect to be any Don Juan."

"But you have noticed a change?"

"Maybe. Only I ain't sayin' it isn't normal. At my age—"

"That's just the trouble!" Adam said violently. "Nobody wants to admit it! People are funny that way. But give me the benefit of the doubt, just for a minute. Let's say the Martians *are* plotting against us. Can you see why they want to get rid of me? I'm *on* to the scheme!"

"But how could they do it?" Dutch asked. "How could they stop men from wantin' to—"

"I don't know. Maybe some kind of secret ray. How should I know?"

Dutch sighed again, this time with finality. "Okay, pal. If that's your story, that's it. Only take my advice, and don't fool around with other guy's women. The next bullet may not miss."

"You don't believe me?"

"I'll report your story. That's all I can do, pal. Me, I'm too old to believe in bogeymen."

When the lawman left the apartment, Adam placed a call to Mrs. Van Culkins.

"Oh, Mr. Bailey!" she said. "I'm terribly sorry about Wanderlee. The poor girl was simply exhausted."

"Well, I still want to see her. More than ever. Can she make it here tomorrow night? Around nine?"

"She'll be there."

Adam knew that Martian women were generally handsome. In the early days of Martian immigration, few of

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them had visited their neighbor planet, and those few were usually the wives of visiting diplomats and business officials. Then the years brought a greater influx of the distaff side of the serene, intelligent race, and their astonishingly even features, and superbly shaped bodies were the cause of much masculine interest. They were quite hairless, of course, but that fault was easily corrected with suitable transformations. Hollywood had already gathered several of the choicest Martian debs, and the OBC had featured them in several color spectaculars.

Wanderlee might not have been the spectacular type, but she would do very nicely. Adam gaped openly at her when she arrived at Apartment 30-B at the scheduled time the following night. Even his desexed eyes could appreciate the perfection of her form. The hair which had been superimposed over her clean naked scalp was shoulder-length and silvery-blonde, and set off her faintly-blue classic features with stunning effect. She wore a white sequined sheathe dress that clung moistly and revealingly to her body. It was agony for Adam to know that he didn't care.

"Mis-ter Bai-ley?" she said, in the soft, harp-like tone peculiar to Martian women, speaking in split syllables.

"Come in," Adam invited. "Glad you could make it, Wanderlee."

"Thank you. I am sor-ry about last night."

"No sorrier than I am." Adam rubbed his right arm ruefully.

He made them a round of drinks, with Wanderlee preferring some Martian *soolt* to his own bourbon. It wasn't easy to get the conversation started, despite Wanderlee's practiced small talk. Finally, Adam switched the subject around to Mr. Ai.

"Oh, yes," the girl said. "Mr. Ai is a fine gent-le-man. He is very cour-te-ous. He is what you call a dip-lo-mat-ic cour-i-er, I be-lieve."

"What time did he leave you last night?"

"About ten-thir-ty."

"And did he know where you were going?"

"Oh, yes. But Mr. Ai, he did not mind. He is most consid-erate."

"Wanderlee—do you get many Earthmen visitors?"

"Oh, yes. But not for some time."

"Do you know why?"

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"No. Earth-men, they are strange. Some-times, they do not want girl." She put her blue fingers on his sleeve and stroked it. "I am glad you want girl."

"Yes," Adam said uneasily.

"You are nice." She patted his cheek.

"Thank you."

"I like you."

"Yes," Adam said.

"I think now," the girl said.

She stood up, and Adam blinked at her. She touched something at the top of her dress, and the cloth began to shift. Suddenly, the sequins shimmered in the light, and the white dress began to slide down her body. In another moment it was on the floor, and Wanderlee was gorgeously and positively naked.

"All-right," she said cheerfully.

Adam was just about to say something when the door opened behind them. He didn't realize it for a moment, but when he saw the face of his visitor, he closed his eyes and murmured idiotically to himself.

The visitor was Doona.

"Well!" she said.

"Doona, listen—" He leaped off the sofa and headed for her.

"So it's all a big Martian plot, eh?" Her violet eyes were flashing fire. "Aren't you fraternizing with the enemy?"

"Please?" Wanderlee said, looking at Doona with bewildered eyes.

"You don't understand," Adam pleaded. "I'm just trying to learn something—"

Doona gasped. "Well, good for you. I'm all for adult education. Good-bye!" Adam stood agape.

She slammed the door behind her.

"La-dy an-gry?" Wanderlee said.

"Yes," Adam groaned. "Lady very angry."

"It is my fault?"

"No. Put your clothes on, Wanderlee. I don't feel very well tonight."

"You don't like Wan-der-lee?"

"I like you very much. Only you can go back to Mrs. Van Culkins now. Here—" He lifted a bill from his wallet and handed it over. "Thanks very much."

She dressed slowly. "You will call Wan-der-lee again?"

"Maybe. When I'm more in the mood."

"You are not in the mood now?"

"No," Adam said bitterly.

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"I haven't been in the mood for a long time."

"Oh," the girl said sympathetically. "I thought perhaps, you were dif-ferent. Like Martian man. It is too bad."

"It's very bad. Now run along, Wanderlee. I want to go to bed. Alone."

She started for the door, her lovely features sad. Then she turned and came back.

"I like you," she said.

"I know. You told me."

"I am sor-ry you are unhappy. I would like to help. But you must promise that you will not tell any-one what I will tell you."

He looked at her with renewed interest.

"Sure. What is it?"

"If you would like Wander-lee, then you must not eat food."

"What?"

"You must not eat," the girl said. "You can do this?"

"I don't know what you're talking about. I *have* to eat. Don't you?"

"Oh, yes. But if you wish to feel in mood for Wan-der-lee, you must not eat for small while. For two days, I think."

"Not eat for two days? Are you kidding?"

"You will try? It will help. You are a nice man. I do not like to see you un-happy."

She looked around the cluttered apartment and clucked with feminine displeasure. "A man like you needs woman very bad."

"Wait a while." He grabbed her arm and she slid against him. "You mean I'll feel differently if I just starve myself? Why should that be?"

"I can-not tell you." She broke from him, and began to gather the stray newspapers and clothing that littered the floor and furniture. Then she emptied the ashtrays, and took some dishes into the kitchen. Adam heard the water running, realized she was washing up. It was like old times.

When she came out, she touched his cheek again.

"You not eat for two days. Then you call Wan-der-lee. Yes?"

She went out. Adam stood stunned for a moment, and then telephoned Gary Nugent.

"Get the hell over here," he said in urgent tones. I think I've learned something."

"Not eat?" Gary said.

"That's what she said. Don't you get it, Gary? This is all tied up with food somehow! That's how the Martians have been working this desexing business."

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"But how?"

"I don't know. Maybe this soil regeneration stuff you're always talking about. Could that be it?"

"The soil," Gary mused. "Hell, I don't see how. I mean, the Martians have developed this fertility chemical, but it's as harmless as salt. It's passed every government test with flying colors. And it's really doing a job."

"Tell me about it."

"Well, there's not much to tell. You see, with farmland so scarce on Mars, their scientists had to find a means for getting the most possible production out of every inch. One of the methods they developed was a chemical that would enrich soil beyond anything we have knowledge of here on Earth. It's great stuff. Practically guarantees crop success. They gave it to the world as a gift—"

"A gift!" Adam snorted. "A Trojan horse!"

"I don't see how. Department of Agriculture cleared it. It's perfectly harmless to humans. It's been in use all over the world for almost six months now . . ."

"All over the world! And if that's the stuff that does the damage—we're really in a fix. Don't you see it, Gary? The chemical must affect the sex hormones in some way. Everything we eat—everything the food animals eat—contaminated!"

"But I told you it was harmless—"

"Harmless how? Did the government run sex tests on the stuff, too? Do they know for sure what it can do to the sex instinct?"

"Of course not! Why should they test *that?*"

They stared at each other for a long moment. Then Adam said:

"Wanderlee must know all about it. Maybe she's right. Maybe if I lay off the food for a couple of days—I'll feel normal again."

Gary rubbed his stomach. "Normal? After starving yourself?"

"You know what I mean! Want to try it?"

"No, thanks, pal. She's *your* friend. You let me know what happens."

"I will," Adam said grimly. "And if it works—I've got to let the whole damned world know . . ." There was life in his eyes for the first time in days.

In the morning, Adam phoned OBC and claimed illness. Then he went into the kitchen and automatically started to make himself coffee. He realized what he was

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doing, cursed, and unplugged the percolater.

In the living room, he ignored the growl in his stomach and turned on the television set.

"Say!" the announcer said. "Here's the kind of country breakfast that brings the whole family a-runnin'! Golden fluffy scrambled eggs, crisp thin strips of bacon, tiny little brown sausages that crackle with deep-down flavor! And to top it all off, be *sure* you have—"

He snapped the set off in disgust, and read the morning paper as it chugged out of the newsprinter.

He went for a walk around the block at eleven, but a needling rain drove him back indoors.

At one o'clock, he settled down with a magazine. The first color page depicted eight ways to serve turkey. He slammed the magazine shut and read a book.

At three o'clock, he was on page 115.

". . . Gordon Holloway strolled into the dining room with Rebecca on his arm, trying to conceal the rage that thundered in his breast after her father's denouncement. A bally fortune-hunter, was he? He'd show the old fool! . . . The table was resplendent with gleaming silverware, and the bill of fare was properly magnificent. They began with *moules marinières, soupe aux pois cassés,* followed by *Coquilles St. Jacques, pommes de terre,* and *soufflé aux pommes* . . .

Adam stopped reading.

By nightfall, he began to have visions of fried chicken and hamburger and sirloin steaks. He paid several visits to the refrigerator, just to look. Was it worth it? he asked himself. Why should I experiment for the whole human race? He moved one hand slowly to a slice of veal lying innocently, succulently on a dish; defenseless, inviting . . .

"No!" he said aloud.

Then he went to bed.

It was hard to fall asleep, and the leaping sheep he conjured up were gradually transformed into mutton.

In the morning, he awoke so ravenous that he was sorely tempted to chuck the whole idea. His hunger seemed to ease off by midday, but by five o'clock, he was practically mewing for food like a sick cat.

He fell asleep on the sofa at six, and didn't awake until eight.

When he opened his eyes,

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they fell on the stack of photographs that Inspector Dutch had been appraising a few nights before. He picked them lackadaisically, and then riffled through them.

"Betty Sanderson," he said reminiscently, gazing at the photo of a dewy-eyed young thing in frilly organdy. "Wonder what ever happened to Betty?" he mused. "And Greta Gustafson! What a hellcat she was! And here's Mona Michner. That tiger rug of hers was really something . . ."

After a while, he became conscious of a subtle, but positive change which had taken place. He was *appreciating* the lovely portraits in front of him. He was *more* than appreciating them. In fact, he was downright—

He jumped from the sofa, scattering the glossies over the floor.

"It's worked!" he cried. "It's really worked!"

He staggered slightly, still weak with hunger. But there wasn't any denying of the familiar sensation that had returned in full, lusty force. He was normal again!

He stumbled towards the telephone, and dialed Doona Dickerson's number with trembling fingers.

"Hello?"

"Doona? It's Adam."

"What do you want?" Her voice was frosty.

"Doona, I've got to see you right away. I've got to explain everything."

"Sorry, but I'm terribly busy."

"Listen, I know you're sore about what happened. Only it wasn't what you think. Will you come over? I'd come to your place, only I'm a little weak."

"I can understand *that*."

"Doona, listen—"

Click!

He groaned, and fell back on the sofa.

An hour later, the door buzzer sounded. He went to answer as rapidly as his weak legs would carry him. But when he flung open the door, his face dropped.

"Wanderlee!"

She smiled glowingly. "You are all right?"

"I'm lousy," he said. "I'm starving to death. I haven't eaten for two days, just like you said."

"Good!"

She preceded him into the apartment, and threw her wrap carelessly over the sofa. She was wearing something soft and feline, and it curved around her statuesque figure with the frankness of a coat

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of paint. When she turned to face him, her eyes were shining in her pale blue face, and her lips were parted moistly.

He said: "Look, Wanderlee, I don't think you should be here—"

"Why not? I am not sent by Mrs. Van Cul-kins. I come here be-cause I like you, A-dam." She extended an arm towards him, crooking her fingers in invitation. "Come," she said.

"You don't understand. I'm expecting someone."

"An-gry la-dy?"

"Maybe." But he came towards her slowly, gaping.

"You still like Wan-der-lee?"

"Of course," Adam breathed, and put an arm around her waist.

"Wan-der-lee still like you, A-dam . . ."

She moved against him, until the velvety outline of her figure was pressed against him like a tattoo. One hand touched his cheek lightly, and the other stole towards the topmost button of her dress.

"Now?" Adam said.

"Now!" Wanderlee answered.

The door opened quietly behind them.

"Now," the Martian said, holding the gun firmly in his slim blue hand. "We re-gret this very much, Mr. Bai-ley. But it has be-come a pol-i-ti-cal nec-ess-ity."

"Who the hell are you!"

"I am Mr. Ai." He bowed slightly from the waist. He was a handsome man, his hairless head seemingly sculptured from some dull blue metal.

"It is all-right," the girl said, still clinging to Adam protectively. "He is like the rest of them. We do not need to harm him."

"This is for my judg-ment, Wan-der-lee. Mr. Bai-ley is undoubt-ed-ly normal, but he is per-haps too well in-formed—"

He lifted the gun, and the girl broke from Adam's unfirm grip. Adam shouted something, half - fearfully, half-defiantly, and tried to move out of the muzzle's path, but the weakened muscles of his legs failed to cooperate. The gun fired. He heard Wanderlee scream, and wondered why. "I'm okay!" he said. Then the Martian was stepping towards him again, and there was another shrill scream. But it wasn't Wanderlee this time. It was Doona Dickerson, appearing suddenly in the hallway, raising a spiked heel over the Martian's gleaming blue skull. He heard

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it descend with all the ugly impact of an ice pick.

"Good girl!" he shouted, but was surprised to find that he couldn't hear his own voice. It was only then that Adam realized he had been shot. He accepted the comfort of the floor gratefully, and closed his eyes. His last thought was of hamburger.

It took a month of convalescence before Adam Bailey began to feel normal. The wound in his side healed slowly, and he required constant attention, plenty of rest, and lots of nourishing food.

But the month restored him to only a surface normality. By the time he was able to become an ambulatory patient at Harkness Pavilion, he discovered that he still suffered from one chronic ailment.

He didn't care for women.

Doona came frequently to cheer him up, and so did Gary Nugent. But the one visitor who finally accomplished the feat was a wide-faced, cigar-chewing gentleman named Dutch.

In the solarium, the inspector pulled up a chair and said:

"Well, it'll all be over soon, Mr. Bailey."

"What will?"

"This Martian business. With all the rumpus you kicked up, there just had to be an investigation. I relayed all the facts to the big boys in Secret Service, and they've taken the case out of local hands. But I've still got a line on the facts, and it should make you feel better."

"You mean they know the truth?"

"They've been suspecting something for sometime, but it's been hard to prove. Now they've been staging starvation experiments for the past month, and the facts worked out. I got the unofficial word that they'll be kickin' the Martian embassy back into space in another couple of weeks."

"That's great," Adam said gloomily. "Now that the damage is done—"

"That's the point. It hasn't been done, not yet. Oh, it's gonna take a few years before we can expunge all of that rotten chemical out of our soil. Then things will go back to normal."

Adam still looked gloomy. "How long is a few years?"

"Nobody knows for sure. Five, six, maybe a little longer. But at least it won't be a permanent effect."

Adam groaned, but not from the pain in his side.

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"Five or six years! They can't *do* that to us!"

Inspector Dutch chuckled. "Oh, don't worry about that part. You won't have to go on eating the stuff. The Department of Agriculture is settin' up hydroponic farms all over the country. We'll be growin' plenty of uncontaminated food pretty soon."

"But how soon? I'd like to get married. I'm sick of this miserable life. I want to live like a normal human being—"

"Don't complain to me, pal," the inspector laughed. "Me, I'm sixty-two years old."

Adam was home two weeks later, and his first caller was Doona Dickerson.

It was a rainy night, and the downpour drummed musically against the window pane. She went over to the hi-fi and slipped a Chopin etude on the player. Then she poured two snifters of brandy and brought them to the couch. She snuggled against Adam's shoulder, and in soft, purring accents said:

"I have something for you, Adam."

"What?"

"Something I got from the market today. They've just arrived from the hydroponic farm."

She reached into her handbag and removed a wax-wrapped object.

"Here, Adam," she said.

It was a plump red hydroponic apple. **THE END**

"Have you any identification?"

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THE SEARCH FOR MURPHY'S BRIDE

By O. H. LESLIE

ILLUSTRATOR SCHROEDER

Men have had mountains named after them; rivers, seas and even candy kisses. But they named a bed after Murphy and that was the greatest honor of all.

I KNEW Elliot Simpson long before he got mixed up with Ray Murphy and his marital problems, but never realized that he was something of an amateur hypnotist. The subject didn't come up until Murphy surprised everyone in our crowd by marrying the sexiest brunette this side of 52nd Street. Her name was Angela O'Conner, and to look at her made your throat go sort of dry and your palms moist and itchy.

Did I say surprised? Stunned is the word. Murphy was a likeable little guy, with a kind of honest homeliness that appealed to old women and small animals. He was a slight, red-headed gnome, with freckles so pronounced you could count them across the room. His skin was as pale as a lizard's underside. He was no great intellect, either, and his prime conversational gambits were a grinning silence or a tuneless whistle.

Nobody really knew what brought Elliot Simpson and Murphy together. Elliot was a sales representative for the art studio where Murphy's considerable talent for the airbrush was employed. Elliot took Murphy in tow for the same mysterious reason that prompts eagles to protect scrawny little sparrows. He helped Murphy buy his clothes, he supervised his social life, he supplied him with the right books to read. It was one of those inexplicable affinities you run into now and then, and it might have done them both a lot of good, if Angela hadn't come along.

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No doubt, there was a sure-fire method, but this wasn't it.

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In all the months of their friendship, Murphy had kept a devout silence about Angela, as he did concerning all his affairs before his sojourn to New York. Murphy had arrived from Baltimore four years ago, where he had been raised on a quiet street by a quiet family, who murmured only vague protests when Murphy decided to conquer the big city with his air-brush. But his family wasn't all that Murphy left behind. He also left Angela, the little dark-eyed girl behind the white picket fence next door. He wrote her blotchy, inscrutable letters every other week for four years. Then, on a homecoming visit, he saw Angela again. Four years had done something for the girl. Murphy proposed. Angela accepted.

I was with Elliot in his miserable, one-room Village apartment when Murphy telephoned his good news all the way from Baltimore. Elliot was visibly shocked by the announcement, and, it seemed to me, crushed by his protegé's retrogression. Elliot had tried linking Murphy with several desirable females, but with no luck. Now he was angered because Murphy had settled for some local dowdy.

But when Angela returned to New York on Murphy's arm, Elliot was surprised. Did I say surprised? I mean stunned.

Angela was exactly Murphy's height—a height that didn't do much for Murphy, but was fine for Angela. She was dark-haired and dark-eyed and white-skinned and long-legged and full-breasted and slim-waisted and—well, supply your own hyphens. This girl glowed. She radiated. She generated.

Elliot gawked when he saw her. He was the kind of guy who believed all women could or should be his personal property, and he wasn't too far from wrong. But there wasn't any charm or confidence in Elliot's handsome face when he met Angela. He was too stupefied at the sight of Murphy's thin, freckled hand on the girl's arm, and Murphy's tiny diamond ring on the girl's finger. He recovered his composure fairly well, but I knew he hadn't emerged from the experience without deep internal scars.

"It shakes your faith," he told me a few nights later. "A runt like Murphy, and a dame like that. It's unholy, Jack. Don't you think?"

"Oh, I dunno," I said, not wanting to admit my own be-

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wilderment. To tell the truth, Elliot's fondness for Murphy had me kind of disgruntled at the time, and I didn't mind widening the breech. "Murphy's not a bad-looking guy," I said. "He's sort of appealing, in a homely way."

"Appealing? Say, you had that prescription changed lately?" He stuck a finger on the lens of my eyeglasses. "That little red monkey could not appeal to Whistler's mother. And don't tell me it's charm! I know better."

"Love is blind," I said cleverly.

Elliot chewed on his thumbnail. "It won't last. One day, she'll open her eyes and get a good look at our little friend. Then she'll scream for the dogcatcher."

"I don't think you're being fair," I said stoutly. "You must see *something* in Murphy. You've certainly been palsy enough."

"Damned if I know why. That little ingrate. I put him onto a dozen nice broads. That ballet dancer from the Met. That sexy little poetess, what's her name, Phyllis—"

"They're nothing compared to Angela," I said.

"Yeah. And not one of them would spit on him. Yet he goes off an' grabs the most luscious babe I ever saw . . ." Then Elliot laughed, and we talked about something else.

The affair seemed to have hurt Elliot more than he would admit. Murphy's conquest had struck at something vital in his ego.

We didn't get to see much of the newlyweds for the rest of the month. I visited Elliot more frequently than I had in some time, and discovered that the loosening threads of our friendship were no longer a source of concern to me. His attitude about Murphy gave me a new perspective on the guy, and I found myself merely tolerating his company, not enjoying it.

It was almost two weeks after Murphy and his bride returned from their honeymoon when Elliot telephoned me and chortled an invitation to call. I didn't want to accept, but his tone was so gleeful that I became curious about the nature of his sudden happiness.

I found him sprawled in an easy chair, plucking on an old guitar which he played miserably, and looking like a canary-filled cat. His room was in its usual disgusted order, with dirty highball glasses and empty beer bottles on the frayed carpet, strewn newspapers and clothes on all the

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furniture. It was an ugly, cluttered room, with a bed that folded away into a wall closet, and with its walls covered to the inch with photos of female conquests: past, present, and of the hopeful future.

"Jack, my boy," he said, with a grand gesture. "Truth will out. Remember what I said about our friend Murphy?"

"You said a lot of things."

"All of 'em true. I had a visitor last night. Give you three guesses."

"Not Angela?" I said—gasped, to tell the truth.

"No," he scowled. "Ray Red-headed Murphy. He sat where you're sitting now, and so help me, he cried. Cried like a baby."

"What's the matter? He and Angela busting up?"

"Not yet. But they've been married two months, and little Angela is Mrs. Murphy in name only. She's pure as the driven snow!" He leaned back and grinned triumphantly.

"What?"

"You heard me. The poor slob came to tell me all about it. Seems Angela led a very sheltered life in Baltimore. Funny; I used to think it was a wild town."

"Murphy told you this?"

"He sure did. He's been trying to get her cooperation since they were married, but all she does is bust out into tears. Not that I blame her. Can you imagine seeing that red-headed imp on the other side of a pillow?"

"That's hard to believe. A girl who looks like that—"

"It must be torture," Elliot agreed. "But that's the story. She just can't help herself. Says she *wants* to, all right, but when day is done and shadows fall—it's no dice. Murphy's a nervous wreck. That's why he came to poppa daddy, for advice."

"And what did you tell him?"

Elliot frowned. "Well, I wanted to help the little guy. After all, we've been pretty good friends. And he's real decent, sometimes. You know I owe him money? Well, I do. Anyway, I let him talk his troubles out; that always helps."

"But what'd you tell him to do? You're the old master."

"I couldn't think of anything at first. Then I had an idea. According to Murphy, Angela's problem is just plain shyness. Happens to a lot of girls. She loves Murphy, all right, and she wants to do her duty, but she just can't break the ice. If you know what I mean."

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"I know," I said. "I read the books."

"Yeah. Well, the problem is psychological. If only Murphy could overcome her reserve, the rest would be easy. So I had an idea. Hypnotism."

"Hypnotism?"

"Sure. It's great stuff, handled right. The thing to do is get Angela hypnotized, and tell her it's okay to hop into bed. That oughta do the trick."

"You're nuts," I said. "That hocus-pocus won't work—"

"The hell it won't. Doctors have been using it therapeutically for years. Sure, people won't do what they don't *want* to do under hypnosis. But Angela *wants* to. She just needs thawing. That's what hypnotism can do for her. I practically cured a guy of stuttering with hypnotism. A few more treatments, and—"

"Whoa! What do you mean, you?"

"Yeah, me," Elliot said. "Guess I never told you about it. I sort of fooled around with hypnotism when I was in college. Got to be pretty good at it. I was even thinking of taking it up seriously, like a profession, but the old man said nix. I haven't thought about it much since."

"And you really think it could work?"

"It's worth a try. I'm going to pay a visit to our newlyweds tonight. Then we can find out if Angela's a good subject."

"But would she agree to the treatment?"

"Oh, we wouldn't tell her the purpose. I'd get her under first. The influence, I mean. Then I'd slip it to her. The hypnotic suggestion."

"I dunno," I said, feeling confused. "I never heard of such a thing."

"It's been done," Elliot said. "I never used it that way myself. Never had to." He yawned. "I'll keep you informed, Jack. Should be mighty interesting."

I didn't hear more about the proposed experiment until almost two weeks later, when I spotted Elliot in a restaurant during the noon hour. He was sitting alone at a corner table, and I would have left him there ordinarily, but his plans for normalizing Murphy's marriage had me intrigued. I made my way to his table, and he greeted me with a pleased grin.

"Well, everything's coming along fine," he told me. "We didn't try anything the first night; just sort of got Angela interested in the subject. She was kind of timid about the

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idea, but then she warmed up a little. I put her under for the first time last week. She's a fine subject."

"And when do you—" I didn't know how to phrase it. "When do you solve Murphy's problem?"

"I'm not sure. I don't want to rush things. I've been putting her into light trances every night this week. You know, that's quite a doll Murphy has there. He oughta be shot for taking such stuff out of circulation . . ." He chomped thoughtfully on a roll, staring off into the distance. For the first time since Murphy's wedding, I had a suspicion that trouble was in the making. Not that I didn't believe Angela loved her little redhead. But Elliot was quite the boy . . .

That night, I was just settling in for an evening of beer and television when the phone rang. It was Elliot, and he was on his way to the Murphy apartment.

"Suppose I pick you up?" he said. "You haven't seen old Murph for some time."

I was half-undressed, but the opportunity to see the three of them together was too good to pass up.

The Murphys had a nice, two-and-a-half room apartment on the upper west side, and Angela's taste was evident in the simple, colorful furnishings. If it wasn't for one of Murphy's air-brushed paintings of fauns at twilight, the living room would have been downright attractive. Angela was wearing something simple, which was exactly the wrong thing to do. The unornamented black dress just emphasized the incredible rounded beauty of its contents, and Elliot couldn't unglue his eyes from her—all night. If Murphy noticed, he didn't complain.

It was Angela herself who brought up Topic A. After a round of drinks, she asked Elliot if he would try his hypnotism talents again. Murphy agreed quickly, and we pushed back the tables and chairs and dimmed some lights.

Elliot propped Angela into the room's plushiest armchair, and pulled an ottoman at her feet. He sat there, talking to her almost inaudibly, until she smiled faintly and shut her eyes. Then he began telling her how tightly shut her eyes were, and how difficult it was to open them. It was amazing how soon the suggestion went to work; she was in a light trance in less than five minutes. Then Elliot talked to her some more, and finally said:

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"All right, Angela. You may open your eyes now, but you must remain asleep."

Her thick dark lashes flew open, and for a moment, I thought the experiment was over. Obviously, it wasn't. Elliot took an apple from the bowl on the table and handed it to her. He said, "Here, Angela. This is a lemon. Bite it. Now go ahead."

She bit the apple, and made a wry face. Then Elliot put her little white hand in his, and did something with the sharp point of a pin. When that was over, he turned to us with a delighted expression.

"She's in a deep trance this time," he said. "Deepest she's ever been, Murph."

"Is that good?" Murphy said eagerly.

"Good? It's wonderful. In fact—" Elliot shot a look at me, and then lowered his voice. "In fact, Murphy, if you want me to tell her now . . ."

"Why right now?" Murphy gulped.

"Good a time as any. If you want me to."

Murphy gave me a guilty eye, and then jerked his head in the affirmative. "All right," he whispered. "Only—I mean, I wonder if Jack could—"

"Don't worry about me," I said, getting the hint. "It's getting late anyway. Think I'll run along."

"Matter of fact," Elliot said casually, "I think it would be a good idea if you *both* left me alone with Angela. This is a kind of delicate business, and I wouldn't want any—disturbing influence. You know what I mean."

"Sure," Murphy said. "I'll take a walk to the corner; get myself a paper."

"Won't be more than five or ten minutes," Elliot promised. Then he reached into his pocket and handed me his doorkey. "Tell you what, Jack. Why not wait for me at my place? I'll be home in another twenty minutes."

"All right," I said, watching Angela's blank face. "I'll wait for you there." I had to admit that I was curious as well.

Murphy and I went out together. The little redhead had quite a spring in his walk as he went down the street. I headed in the other direction for Elliot's Village apartment, and waited.

In half an hour, Elliot pushed open the door and came in grinning.

"Well," he said. "That takes care of *that*."

"How'd everything go?"

I waited a maddening two minutes while he lowered the bed from the closet, flopped on

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it, kicked off his shoes, and lit a cigarette. Then he said:

"Like a dream. Angela was practically panting for the little red-haired monster by the time I left. That boy's going to have himself a time." He chuckled.

I shook my head in wonderment. "Amazing," I said.

"Not amazing at all. Scientific."

"I don't mean that. I mean you. I'd never known you to go to so much trouble for another guy's—" I sighed. "I dunno, Elliot. You must have hidden depths."

"Think nothin' of it," he said airily. "A friend is a friend. Glad I could help old Murph." But then he chuckled again, and I didn't like the sound of it.

"You sure everything's okay?"

"Everything is glorious. Now let's have a beer to toast the happy couple. Then you can beat it, old friend."

"What's the rush? It's only ten-thirty."

"Sure. But I could be expecting company, you know." He fluffed up the pillow behind him, still snickering.

I went and got the beer, and opened it thoughtfully. When I came back, I said: "Now look, pal. You're just a little too pleased by this business. Sounds suspicious."

"Suspicious? You wound me deeply. Take my word for it, Jack. Murphy will be a happy man tonight, and my friend forever after. No reason why I shouldn't get some of the gravy, is there?"

"How do you mean?"

"Do you know what post-hypnotic suggestion is?"

"No."

"Well, it's just as powerful as any suggestion made during the actual trance state. You can tell someone to do something hours and even days afterward. And they do it, sure enough. And when you've got a really good subject—"

"Wait a minute! Did you do this to Angela?"

"Yep."

I got a quick chill on my neck. "A suggestion involving Elliot Simpson?"

"Yep."

"Something about tonight?"

"Yep."

"You mean Angela Murphy's coming up here tonight? You're crazy!"

"Like a fox. After Murphy wreaks his evil will on the poor girl, she's going to hop out of bed and take a little walk. To a taxi stand." He looked at his watch. "Figure she ought to be here some-

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where between eleven and twelve."

"I don't believe it!"

"Your prerogative. Only drink your beer and beat it."

I drank the beer, but slowly. When the telephone rang, I jumped so hard that I kicked over the glass on the floor and sent foam bubbling over the carpet. Elliot picked up the receiver languidly. I couldn't hear the voice on the other end, but it was obviously Ray Murphy.

"Now don't get excited," Elliot told him. "It's not unusual that Angela feels the need for a little walk. I mean, don't forget, Murph. This is a new experience for the poor kid. . . . I said, don't worry. As long as everything went all right, you have nothing to worry about. You just let her go."

He put down the phone and grinned at me. "So long," he said.

"So long," I answered bitterly, and stomped to the door.

I loitered around the entrance to the apartment building, full of wrath at Elliot's plotting, and hoping that Angela would snap out of it somehow and stay away. It was a vain hope. In ten minutes, a cab pulled up, and Angela's unmistakeable hips swung out of it. She headed towards the building, and I ducked into the shadow of the entrance next door. I watched her enter the lobby, and study the mailboxes for Elliot's name. Then she was out of sight.

I lit a cigarette, and it tasted like hay. But I smoked it down to the last inch, and then ground it underfoot. I was grateful for that cigarette, because it delayed me long enough to see Angela's exit. She came tearing out of the doorway like a runaway locomotive, and brushed past me without a word. I couldn't figure out what had happened, so I headed back to Elliot's flat.

The door was open, and somebody was being pretty noisy inside. I walked in and didn't see Elliot. Then I realized the closet bed was back in place, and Elliot was still in the bed. He was pounding away furiously, interspersing his pleas for rescue with beautiful, well-phrased swear words. I felt like keeping him there for a while, but I was too softhearted. I clicked open the latch and lowered the bed.

"What happened?" I said, trying not to smile.

"She fooled me!" he raged. "She pushed the bed back into

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the closet. Then the little tramp runs out—"

"Well, I said, "you told me yourself. People won't do what they don't want to do. Not even under hypnosis."

Then it hit me, and I started to laugh. I mean I laughed. I roared. I shrieked. I walked around in little circles, holding my stomach it ached so.

"What's so funny?" Elliot said.

"The bed. You know what they call that kind of bed, don't you?"

"No."

"It's a Murphy bed," I told him. "Well, so long, Svengali. Pleasant dreams." **THE END**

"I have no desire to pry into your private affairs, Burch; however, it has been brought to my attention that you filed an estimated income this year of $5,003,850."

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THE LAVENDER TALENT

By GERALD VANCE

ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

When the Martian works of art arrived on earth, the competition to possess them was a matter of pride. Later it became a matter of life and death.

WHEN Dr. Split threw open the windows, he saw that it was a fine, crisp morning, with delicious zephyrs hurtling off the bay. He opened the top of his pajamas, set the dial on his chest for "FULL" and breathed deeply of the Chicago air.

It had all the earmarks of a rewarding day. There was bacon sizzling in the autochef, and his wife, Parka, could be heard in the kitchen, making bustling, housewife noises. There were wild sprays of forsythia already in the garden, promising warmer days. He was feeling strong, and whole, and younger than his forty years.

And then there was the Shipment.

Dr. Split chuckled happily at the thought, and the effort was too much for the mechanical lung which ordered his breathing. He coughed loudly, and fumbled for the dial.

He was fine by the time Parka came into the bedroom, solicitous as always.

"Are you all right?" she said. There was a "V" in the middle of her forehead, permanently engraved since the day her husband returned in the hospital ship from Mars.

"Perfectly." He smiled at her, his face boyish even under the mane of white hair. Then he shook his head like a despairing parent. "I'll admit it's warmer," he said, frowning to hide his amusement. "But hardly *that* warm, my dear—"

She looked down at herself. She was naked.

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"Oh, damn," Parka said. "I'll never get used to the temperatures you like, Freddy." He continued to frown, so she sighed and picked up a diaphanous nightgown from the bed. Parka had been a native of Byrd, in the Arctic Circle, before she had met and married her husband.

"I was just thinking about the Shipment," Dr. Split said.

"Well, don't, if it makes you ill—"

"It doesn't make me ill. It makes me feel wonderful!"

He came over to her. "If I could make you understand," he said. "The importance! The miracle of it! I go to bed every night with a prayer of thanks to that Michaelson crew for discovering it. What a treasure, Parka!"

She patted his cheek indulgently. "You're a treasure," she said. "Come and eat, curator."

"I plan to have the official exhibition next week, but if you'd like a sneak preview—"

She took him by the hand and led him into the kitchen. "No, thanks," she said. "I've seen pictures of those monstrosities—"

"Monstrosities?" He was horrified. "Parka, this statuary will be the *piece de resistance* of the Galactic Museum—"

"You said that about the Venusian mollusks," she reminded. "Will this be enough bacon?"

"The Lavenders will make beachcomber's trophies out of the mollusks—"

"The what?" She set the toaster dial for "buttered."

"The Lavenders," Dr. Split said. "That's my unofficial name for them." He looked embarrassed. "They're lavender, you see."

"Why, that's very pretty, Freddy. How do you want your coffee?"

"Ecuador," Dr. Split said. "You see, you really can't judge the pieces by the news photos you saw. First of all, they were telephotoed from space, and that always distorts them. And the color was all wrong. They're really splendid examples of—well, they're at least evidence that there *were* inhabitants on the planet. And cultured inhabitants at that."

"I'll never understand these things," Parka said. "So much fuss and feathers about bits of fungus and rocks—"

"Hardly bits," Dr. Split laughed. "The Lavenders average eight to nine feet tall. Three of them are almost twelve feet. And they're beau-

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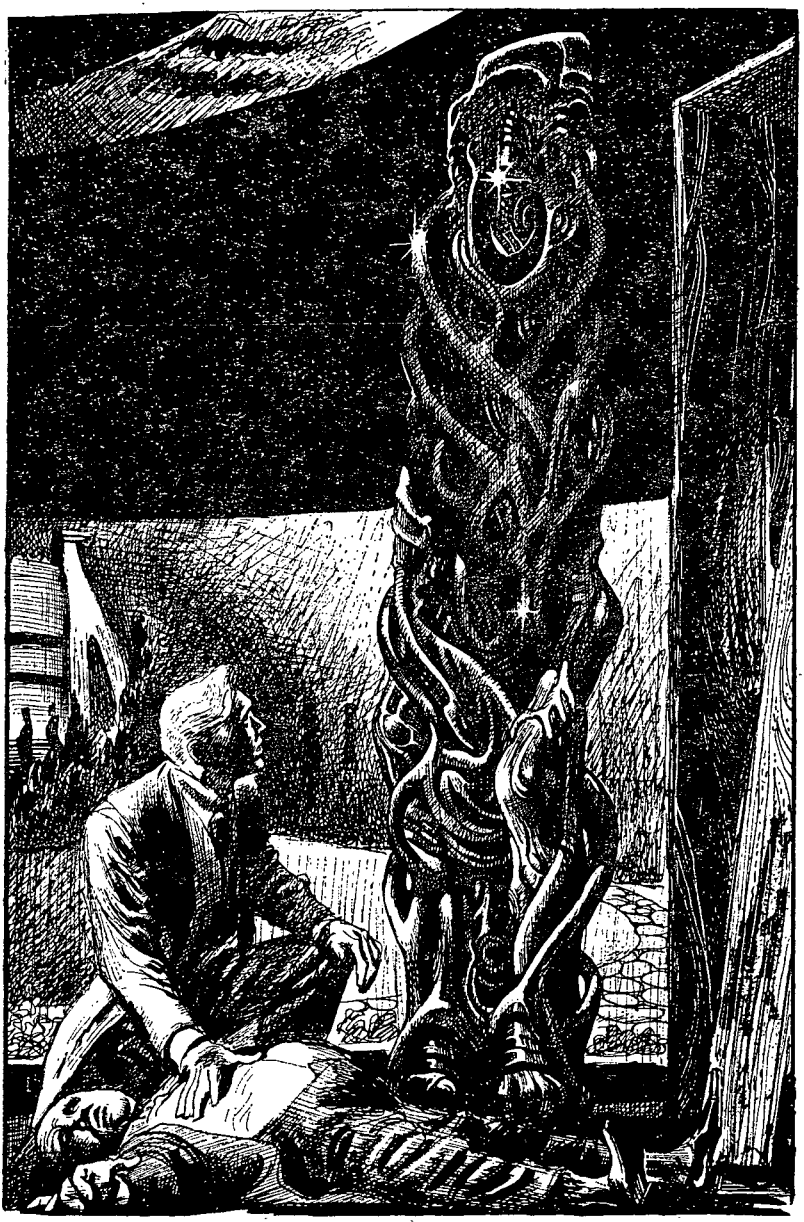

Undisturbed by death, the artifact gleamed in unearthly beauty.

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tiful! Lovely! Great, twisted things of this exquisite petrified mineral. Why, do you realize—" he leaned forward enthusiastically, and Parka managed to slip the coffee cup out of harm's way—"that the average weight of the pieces is four *tons?*" He paused for reaction, but Parka's mind was elsewhere.

"You don't suppose Worthington will be any trouble?" she asked distantly.

He blinked. "Worthington? Of course not. But as I was telling you—the Lavenders have been compared to the megaliths of Easter Island. It's still an anthropologic mystery how—" He stopped. "Why should Worthington be any trouble?"

"I don't know. I read something about it on the newsprinter this morning. About some claim of his."

"Claim? What claim?"

"I really don't *know,* darling. Didn't you tell me once that he had filed for the pieces with the Bureau of Specimens and Fossils?"

Dr. Split shrugged. "Well, yes, but what museum in the country hasn't? After all, there's been nothing like this since the Rosetta stone. But the Galactic has first claim on interplanetary specimens and artifacts."

"Well, that's good," Parka said comfortably. "You know what happens to Ecuador coffee when it gets cold," she chided.

Dr. Split gulped it. "Worthington!" he chuckled. "That old pirate—"

"Don't talk while you're drinking."

"He makes me laugh. He's a comic-strip curator. *Ars gratia artis—*"

"That's not very nice," his wife said primly.

"The National Museum of Art isn't a museum. It's a mausoleum—"

"You better get dressed," Parka said.

Her husband shot a look at his watch, nodded agreement, and hurried into the bedroom.

He made happy, splashing noises in the bath, and was out again in half an hour, ready for the day. He kissed Parka briskly on the cheek, and went out the door.

When he was gone, she slipped out of her nightgown and tossed it idly on a kitchen chair. Then she padded over the soft rugs to the foyer, and picked up the dangling sheets of newsprint in the machine. Before she tossed them away, she looked again for the item which had

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caught her wandering attention that morning.

She found it in Section Seven.

"Dr. August Worthington, Curator of the National Museum of Art, has started proceedings in the U. S. Supreme Court for possession of the eight recently-discovered relics of Martian civilization, unearthed by an expeditionary force led by Col. Jacob Michaelson. Dr. Worthington's appeal will be based upon the contention that the eight works of sculpture constitute 'examples of art and culture' as opposed to 'specimens and artifacts,' and therefore belong in the National Art Museum rather than the Galactic Museum to which they have been currently assigned."

Steerforth was waiting for Dr. Split in the curator's office. His little round body was quivering with excitement.

"Dr. Split! Thank God!" he spluttered. "What a morning to be late! Oh, that man!"

Dr. Split laughed. "What man?" He circled the desk and took his chair, his hands diving automatically into the accumulation of mail.

"What man? Worthington, of course!" The curator's aide flapped about the desk like a bird with a broken wing. "He won't stop at anything, you know. Unscrupulous. Completely unscrupulous!"

"You're getting overwrought about nothing."

"I'm glad you're so confident." The little man wrung his hands. "When I think of the expense! The brass plates alone will cost the Museum three thousand dollars. We're stretching our budget the way it is. And the repairs we made in Wing E to accommodate the things—"

"Randolph!" Dr. Split looked up sharply. "Haven't you got other things to do? Everything must be ready. We'll be uncrating the specimens in ten minutes."

"Will we?" Steerforth groaned. "Do you really think we should? If we left them crated and returned them to Customs, we could save the shipping charges—"

"Are you out of your mind?"

"Well, just until they make a ruling—"

"Ruling?" Dr. Split's lean face went white. "What's happened, Randolph?"

Steerforth told him. Dr. Split took the news stoically, but swore at himself for not listening to Parka's words that morning.

He slammed his fist into

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his palm. "We'll fight!" he said.

"What can we do? It's up to the Legal Computor. Worthington would never have made such a decision if he didn't think he could win. You know how cautious he is."

"They can't have our Lavenders!" Dr. Split thundered. He came around the desk and towered over his aide. "They belong to us!"

Steerforth cowered. "I know, Doctor. But it's out of our hands—"

"We're nothing without them! A rotten collection of pebbles and sponges and dry bones! The Lavenders will *make* this Museum, Randolph!"

The little man looked mournful. The curator glared at him, and then dropped a gentle hand on his shoulder.

"Let's open the crates," he said.

When the first Lavender was free of its wooden prison, the curator, his aide, Jenny, the Museum secretary, and even the two workmen stood back from the monument with conspicuous awe.

"Lord, Lord!" Dr. Split breathed.

"Oh, dear!" Steerforth said.

"Gosh!" said Jenny.

"Holy cats!" said one of the workmen. The other's remark was unprintable.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" The curator's eyes were large.

"Yes, yes it is," Steerforth agreed.

"Gives me the creeps," Jenny said.

It was some nine feet high. It began in a tortuously-twisted knotted mass, and rose in sweeping, twisting curves, towards the ceiling. It was smooth, slippery as glass, breathtakingly balanced, shockingly lavender.

"What is it?" the first workman asked.

"What's the difference?" Jenny said. She stepped towards the thing, hypnotically. Her hand went out.

"Don't touch it!" Dr. Split cried. She leaped back. "I don't want anyone touching it," he said sternly. "It's an alien thing. We don't know anything about it. Remember the Venusian mollusk?"

"Ugh!" Jenny said expressively. She rubbed the back of her plump hand, remembering the vivid rash.

"You want we should open the others?" the second workman said.

"Yes, please!" Steerforth told him.

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He picked up the crowbar. But he had barely inserted it into the frame of the second crate, when clacking footsteps sounded behind them on the marble floor of the Museum.

The group turned at the sound. There were three men coming towards them, like the vanguard of an advancing army.

"Worthington!" Steerforth gasped.

The man at the head of the three-man wedge came to a clicking halt. He wore a gray pin-striped suit, with a modest carnation in the buttonhole. His silvery hair was carefully brushed, and his small neat moustache was freshly waxed.

"Ah!" he said. He whipped off his gloves and bowed to the two men behind him. "Zimmer. Craven." He turned to Dr. Split. "Of Zimmer, Craven, and Zimmer. My attorneys."

Split spoke harshly. "What do you want here, Worthington?"

"Ah," Worthington said. He looked past the curator at the first Lavender. He removed a pair of eyeglasses from the breast pocket of his coat, and slipped them on. He came closer to the specimen, peered at it, leaned back, peered at it again, and then removed the spectacles and replaced them.

"Lovely!" he said.

"I don't recall inviting you," Dr. Split said.

"I merely assumed." Worthington nodded towards the little assistant. "After I spoke to you this morning—"

"Randolph!" The curator looked furious, and Steerforth's head ducked into his collar.

"I merely wanted to find out," Worthington said very smoothly, "whether you were going ahead as planned. After everything, that is."

"You have no right to these specimens," Dr. Split raged. "That's been settled, Worthington! They're Galactic property!"

The lawyer called Zimmer, a dry stick of a man with bloodless lips, said: "They're works of art, Dr. Split. Not archaeological curiosities."

"Exactly," his partner said.

"The Martians were artists," Worthington told his audience. "They had a great talent. The Lavender Talent, I call it. I have a little piece about it in the forthcoming Art News. You must read it, Dr. Split. It may, er—broaden your outlook."

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Split took a step forward.

"Look, Worthington. I'm not going to trade arguments with you. Make it a court battle, if you want to. But I think you'll lose."

"Really?" He looked bored.

"Yes. I think you'll lose because of one factor. The Unknown Quantity—"

"Which means what?"

"Which means the rash that infected everyone who touched the Venusian mollusks. The poisonous seed of the Mercurian water-flower. The wild growth factor of the Martian lichen—"

"Oh, that," the art curator said. "You've got a hundred examples of harmless extra-terrestrial specimens. Don't you, Doctor? I've been through your little museum. These do not belong here."

"You're not dealing with *objets d'art!*" Dr. Split said violently. "You're dealing with alien things!" He coughed in an alarming explosion, and Jenny gripped his arm in concern.

"Be careful—" she said.

"I'm all right!" he answered angrily.

He sat down weakly on the folding chair quickly supplied by his aide. When he recovered his normal breathing function, he spoke again:

"This lung of mine's a good example, Worthington," he said wryly. "That's what I got for scrambling around an alien world—"

"I'm sorry," Worthington said gently. "But it's really beside the point . . ."

He went to the imposing Lavender again. His hand slid over the smooth, shining surface. Split made no effort to warn him away.

"A great talent," Worthington said reverently.

When Dr. Split arrived home that night, he found Parka in tears.

"What is it, sweetie?" he asked.

There was an opened box on her lap. She jammed a sheet of paper onto the pile, and snapped the lid shut.

"It's nothing," she said, wiping her eyes. "Just wanted a good cry." She placed the box on the table. "I was doing some cleaning. I ran across your letters from Mars."

He squeezed her hand. "That's all over, honey."

"I know." She looked at him mistily. "It was all so terrible. The accident. I never thought you'd come out of it—" An overflow was threatened again, and Dr. Split placed a noisy kiss on her eyelid.

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"Cheer up," he said. "I'm fine now. And hungry!"

"Dinner's in the autochef. Is venison all right?"

"Venison is fine."

At the dinner table, Parka's mood brightened. But as her husband recounted the events of his day, he grew more and more downcast, and their roles were reversed.

"Please don't let it worry you," she said. "I'm sure it will work out, Freddy."

"But it's our first *real* exhibit. It would *establish* the Museum—make it more than a collection of freaks—"

"Your attendance isn't bad."

"It's getting worse. How many tax dollars will the government spend on a flop project—"

Parka was firm. "It's not a flop!"

"Sometimes I think the Galactic Museum was started for my benefit only," Dr. Split said broodingly. "A nice, safe, government slot for broken-down archaeologists . . ."

"Freddy!"

"Well, let's face it, Parka! I'm not much good for anything but a desk now. I thought the Museum would be a real contribution—something to make the world universe-minded—"

"It is, Freddy! It is!"

"No. It might be—with the Lavenders. However, without them—"

In the hallway, the newsprinter chimed softly.

They looked at each other.

"A bulletin," Parka said.

Dr. Split put down his fork, and went into the hallway. When he returned to the table, there was a sheet of newsprint in his hand, torn jaggedly from the machine.

His face was pale. He read the words aloud.

". . . *Supreme Court Master Legal Computor announces result of decision in the case of National Museum of Art vs. National Galactic Museum . . . in favor of plaintiff . . . court order to transfer Martian specimens to Washington . . .*"

The paper fluttered from his fingers. He sat down, breathing heavily.

"Freddy—"

"No," Dr. Split said. He stared at nothing, and then the breath rasped in his throat.

"Freddy!" Parka shouted.

His fingers fumbled with his shirt button. He adjusted the dial on his chest.

He was better in a moment. But when he looked into Parka's face, there was a dis-

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turbing glint in his dark eyes.

"I'm going to the Museum," he said.

"But it's after seven—"

"Steerforth will be there. I must see them. I must!"

"But what good would it do?"

"I don't know! But I want to see them, Parka!"

She touched his white hair.

"I'll get your coat."

He entered the Museum half an hour later, feeling that insidious chill of loneliness peculiar to public places deserted after dark. There was moonlight slanting through the high windows, and the light falling on the strange exhibits was eerie, and provocative of mystic thoughts.

There was a slit of warm light beneath the door of his office, where his loyal aide would be sitting amidst a pile of unfinished paper work.

His footsteps were loud on the floor as he approached.

"Randolph?" He pushed the door open.

The office was empty.

"Randolph! Where the blazes are you?"

He made a search of the only other executive office in the Museum, and then hurried through the corridors, searching for his assistant.

He finally located him in Wing E.

Steerforth was lying on his back in front of the first Lavender, his little round stomach protruding comically. His eyeglasses were a foot from his head, and his mouth was open.

"Randolph!"

Dr. Split bent over him, and felt a shiver of horror as he appraised the stillness of the figure, the lack of breath from the opened mouth. He put his head to the little man's chest, and listened for the thump which could indicate life. There was none.

Poor Steerforth! Was it a heart attack?

The moon was white and round behind the Lavender, and its shadow knifed across the two men on the Museum floor. Dr. Split looked up at it, and felt the presence of peril.

He got to his feet, backed away from the alien object, and then took a hesitant step towards it.

There was something wrong. But what?

His hand went out, and touched the slippery surface.

It was warm!

He pulled his hand away as if from fire.

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Then he knew what was wrong. The Lavender had *changed.*

Subtly, strangely, the contours had altered; the great twisting planes had taken new courses. It was different; metamorphosed; like some giant animal that had shifted about in the throes of sleep.

But that was impossible. It was stone. Petrified!

Or was it?

He looked again at the body of Steerforth. Was it a trick of the moonlight—or was there a terrible bruise around the little man's throat? A horrible reddening where a slippery tentacle might have—

His eyes went back to the Lavender.

It was moving!

Dr. Split shrieked, and the cry was quickly silenced by the stoppage of air in his windpipe. He gasped, choked out a wordless plea for help, and fell forward into darkness.

Suddenly, there was Parka.

"Look out!" he cried at her.

"It's all right, Freddy." She spoke soothingly, in quiet, hospital tones. His eyes surveyed the white room. There was daylight in the window.

"Steerforth—" he said.

"I'm afraid he's dead. The shock must have been terrible for you. Your lungs—"

He tried to sit up, and felt another hand on his shoulder. It was Jenny, her broad face sad.

"You're okay now, Dr. Split. You gave us a scare."

"What time is it?"

"Five o'clock," Parka said. Her eyes were blurred.

"The Museum. The Lavenders—"

"They're gone, Freddy."

"What?"

Now Jenny spoke bitterly. "Worthington didn't waste any time. They called for them this morning at nine. Not half an hour after they took poor Mr. Steerforth . . ." She dissolved into tears at the thought of it.

"We've got to warn them," Dr. Split said wildly. "They are dangerous. They killed Randolph!"

Parka looked unhappy. "Oh, Freddy."

"You've just had a bad dream," Jenny said softly, stabbing at her eyes with her handkerchief. "You've been saying that since they brought you in."

"But it's true—"

"Worthington was here," Parka said. "He said you were delirious—that you dreamed the whole thing up,

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just to—to stop him from taking possession . . ."

"They're alive!" Dr. Split screamed. "They're living things! They're not monuments at all!"

He looked at their faces, and recognized the disbelief he would receive from unkinder sources.

"But they *are* alive," he muttered, shaking his head. He leaned back on the pillow. "They're not Martian art at all. I think they're . . . the Martians themselves . . ."

Dr. August Worthington shook the hand of the Latin gentleman with the gray goatee and beamed.

"My pleasure, sir, my pleasure," he said.

"No, really enjoyed it," the man said. "Don't care much for museums. Found this rather interesting."

"I thank you, Signor le Presidente," Worthington said. "Thank you." He bowed charmingly to the rest of the delegation. They echoed their leader's congratulations to the curator, and departed.

Wilson, his assistant, offered his own congratulations.

"A decided triumph," Worthington agreed.

They passed the Lavender exhibit.

"I never tire of looking at them," Worthington said. "I seem to discover new beauty in them every day. A sort of ever-changing loveliness."

Worthington paused in front of them. "That one on the end, for instance. Doesn't it look—well, changed?"

"I hadn't noticed it."

"Mmm." Worthington studied it, then shrugged. "Well, back to work. I'm afraid I have some papers to clear up, but you can leave anytime."

Wilson put on his topcoat.

"Good night, Wilson."

But when he was alone behind the polished desk of his office, Curator Worthington sat motionlessly before the documents that required his attention, lost in a reverie, savoring again the praises of the dignitaries who had visited the museum that day, thinking what a fine fellow he was. When he heard what he thought was a knock on the panelled oak door of his office, he called out a cheerful "Come in!" before he remembered that the museum was deserted.

Even as the twisting, hulking thing was upon him, a faint smile of satisfaction was on Worthington's face, until it was replaced by the stony grimace of death.

THE END

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THE GENIE TAKES A WIFE

(Continued from page 23)

"Here she comes," he grunted.

Out came the cork, and out came a *whoosh* of smoke that rushed into the room with all the ferocity of a volcano gone berserk; a geyser of black, billowing clouds that seemed to darken the room in seconds, filling every corner with its strange, fetid scent, spreading itself thick as night over everything, with a roaring, deafening sound that drowned out Blossom's shriek of drunken terror, the fearful cries of the Arab women, the startled shout of Leon, and Jay Burgess' ecstatic scream of surprise and wonder.

It was the Genie! There was no doubt that the miracle was here. The black clouds were becoming solid and tangible, forming into a shape that couldn't be confined by the beamed room of the inn of Ibn Ridyah. The shape pushed and pressed against the roof until the wood cracked and shivered and splintered, until the stone itself began to crumple to powder. It was the shape of a man, with dead white skin, a young, angry face, a turbaned head; a man who towered an unbelieving height over the world. Hundreds of feet he went towards the sky, growing larger and larger, and the sound of his booming, demoniacal laughter reverberated across the desert.

"The Genie! The Genie!" Jay Burgess shouted, his voice croaking with joy. "We found the Genie!"

"Holy cow!" Leon said. "I didn't know he was gonna be such a big one—"

Blossom shivered against Jay's chest, afraid to look. By this time, the Arab women had fled the inn, leaving it to the demons.

"Talk to him," Leon said. "Talk to him, for Pete's sake!"

Jay cupped a hand to his mouth. "Genie! Can you hear me?"

"Does he speak English?" Blossom said, trembling.

"I don't know. Genie! Can you hear me?"

Then the huge face was bending towards him, and the lips were parting in an incredible fifty-foot smile.

"And who is my little benefactor?" he asked, in sweet clear accents.

"He does speak English!"

"I speak what language pleases you, my little liberator. Come, let us converse."

When Jay saw the giant hand beginning to descend

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towards him, he debated whether or not he should faint. He decided against it, and allowed the great fingers to close gently about his waist, and lift him at dizzying speed to the Genie's eye-level. He was deposited in the Genie's palm, where he almost tripped over the deep-grooved heart line.

"Speak, little benefactor," the Genie said. "Now that you have released me, my will is yours."

"Gosh, Mr. Genie—" Jay fought the growing stammer in his voice. "All I really want is information—"

"Ah, of course. You wish the fabled Window on the World, the magic glass that sees all the doings of mankind. I have had many requests for that."

"No, you don't understand. I want information about *you*. You see, my hobby is Classical Mythology—"

The Genie roared with laughter, and the sound sent Jay sprawling backwards, bumping his head on the Mound of Venus. He got up and said: "I'm serious. I want to ask you some questions."

"Ask away, little one. I am yours to command."

"Well, how long have you been in the bottle?"

"One thousand, one hundred and forty-nine years, four months, two weeks, four days. I have kept good track of time; there was little else to do. I had served the great caliph Harun-el-Rashid well, and aided him in building the empire of the Abbasids until his death. Then his enemies tricked me into my imprisonment, and I have remained there until this day, oh, my benefactor."

"But what about Mr. Hassim? The man who found you in the desert? Didn't he let you out, too?"

With his other hand, the Genie scratched his face and looked embarrassed.

"Oh, yes. I had forgotten about my little bearded friend. That was a most unfortunate episode; I do not like to speak of it."

"What happened?"

"You see, the ancient laws that guide my destiny do not permit me to deny my benefactors any wish their heart desires. But I committed a grievous sin against Mr. Hassim, and was punished by being imprisoned once more."

"What sin was that?"

The Genie blushed; it was as spectacular as a sunset.

"He requested a harem of the world's most exquisite women, a harem in which he

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would be the sole and only sultan. It was a great pleasure for me to produce these lovely creatures for him; but it had been so many years since I had seen a woman—" He paused. "Forgive me, noble benefactor. It is my one greatest weakness. I could not resist the sight of so much beauty, so I became the size of mortal men and took my pleasure in the harem that was willed to be for him alone. It was then that the gods returned me to my bottle."

"And what happened to Hassim?"

"He was angered by the decision of the gods in sending me back where I could grant him no more wishes. He tried to shatter the bottle that housed me. In vengeance, the gods took away his harem. The poor man cried like a baby."

The Genie smiled.

"And now, little one, give me your wishes, so that I can perform my acts of gratitude!"

There were shouts from below, and Jay looked over the edge of the giant's palm to see Leon and Blossom, hopping up and down excitedly.

"A million dollars!" Blossom was crying. "A million dollars!"

"*Ten* million!" Leon shouted. "Make it ten million! Fifty! A hundred!"

The Genie looked at Jay. "You have financial advisors?"

"Just some friends of mine. You see, I really don't need money; I've got oodles. I just wanted to find you for the sake of science."

"Surely there must be some wish, some desire in your heart? Something which your money cannot buy?"

Jay knitted his brow. "Well, I *do* have a sort of problem, but I don't see how you can help. It's a kind of romantic problem."

"Ah," the Genie said.

"You see, there's this girl I'm engaged to marry, Dorothea Wardley. A very beautiful girl, no question about that. But I still feel sort of *depressed* about it. It's not that I don't *love* her, but she's so—cold. Aloof. I dunno how to explain it."

"Cold?"

"Yes. When I kiss her for instance. It's like kissing an ice tray. Just the thought of being *married* to her—and all that—it gives me the shivers."

"An interesting problem," the Genie grinned. "Very well, my little benefactor, let us solve it together. I will see that you find happiness.

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Where is this woman of yours?"

"Back in Medina. The last I saw of her, she was touring the city with some local Valentino. She was pretty warm with *him*, all right."

"Medina? It is so long since I have seen that holy city. Come, little one, and we shall see what the powers of the Djinn can do for your romance."

He laughed uproariously, and his hand closed around Jay's body. For a wild moment, he thought he would be crushed to death, but the fingers remained gentle, providing just enough security for him to survive the incredible moments that followed. He was being lifted, higher and higher into the sky, carried like the young of a great eagle into the heavens!

"Where are we going?" Jay shouted, against the roar of the rushing wind.

"To Medina!" the Genie shouted back, and the hilltops rocked with his laughter.

Later, Jay Burgess was unable to describe the lightning trip that took place between Harajiya and Medina, or how he found himself, amazingly, in the narrow street outside the home of Abu Samhadin, no longer in the company of a giant, but accompanied by a turbaned young man only three inches taller than himself.

"I don't understand!" he said in bewilderment. "Where is the Geni?"

The young man laughed. "Do you not recognize me, oh, benefactor? It is I, Ahmed, transformed to mortal man's size. We will find our errand simplified if we raise no outcry."

"But what do we do now?"

"Follow me, to the garden."

He followed the Genie numbly to the rear of the house where a fat moon was rolling voluptuously on the velvet blackness of the heavens. The moonlight was strong; it clearly outlined the two figures in the garden.

"Why, it's—"

"Shhh!" the Genie cautioned. "Let us listen."

"Abu," Dorothea was saying, honey in her voice. "Why do you want to live in Medina, after America?"

"How can I make you understand, my darling?" The rich, mellow voice was persuasive. "It is more than the attraction of home which brings my footsteps ever East. It is a mystery and a wonderment, an enchantment like none other in this dreary world.

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You could learn to love it, my dearest."

"Why that skunk," Jay said hoarsely. "That's *my* girl he's talking to."

"Silence," the Genie said. "Our turn comes."

"Abu," Dorothea whispered.

"Dorothea," Abu said.

They kissed, and Jay whimpered in his throat.

"Argh!" Abu said, springing backwards. "You have been eating pork!"

"What?" Dorothea looked astonished.

"I taste pork on your breath! You know I am not permitted—"

"But I haven't, really! All I had was oink," Dorothea said.

"What?"

"Oink," she repeated patiently. "Oink, oink, oink. What's the matter with you? Can't you understand what I'm oinking?"

"Your face—" Abu Samhadin backed away with loathing. "It's the face of a pig!"

"I *beg* your pardon," Dorothea said stiffly. "A minute ago, you said I had the oink of an angel. If *that's* how you're going to behave—"

"Demon!" Abu shouted. "Get away from me!"

"Well! I've never been so insulted in my whole *oink!*"

"Away! Away!"

"Don't worry! I'm leaving here the minute my fiance returns!"

She flounced out of the garden and back into the house, leaving her host cowering and shaking among the flowers, all composure gone.

"Follow me," the Genie whispered, and led Jay through a rear door into the house.

"They'll see us!"

"No, my benefactor. We are invisible to them."

Mrs. Wardley was in the front room, and she looked up in surprise as her daughter stormed in.

"Why, Dorothea, dear! What's wrong?"

"Oh, nothing. That *awful* man just insulted me! When Jay comes back, I'm going to insist upon leaving first thing in the morning!"

Mrs. Wardley shook her head. "*If* he comes back. I don't *trust* that man any more, Dorothea. Not after the way he's acted. Frankly, I think we're making a terrible mistake, marrying him."

"You do?"

"I'm afraid so. And not only that, I doubt if that family fortune of his is really so impressive as we thought. The way he squanders his money —, why in a few years, he may

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be almost as impoverished as we are."

"Oh, Mother!" Dorothea wailed. "Then what can we *do?*"

"We'll have to find some way to break the engagement. That's all we *can* do. Now if you'll just listen to Mother—"

"Of course, Mother, dear. You *always* know the right thing to do."

"Thank you, darling. When we come back to the United States, I'll see what I can arrange with that Watkins boy. You know the one I mean? The ice-cream millionaire?"

"But his family's so *stiff*, Mother. So formal. So proper. I wonder if they won't realize about—well, you know. That we're not really so—what if they should discover—"

"There, there, Dorothea, leave it all to Mother. We can be as proper Bostonian as anyone." She giggled suddenly. "As a matter of fact, I was closed in Boston."

"What?" Dorothea looked startled.

"Sure, kiddo," Mrs. Wardley said raucously. "It was the old Fleagle Street bit, and I added a few variations of my own. Want to see 'em?" She got up from the chair and unpinned her dress from the rear, then she pulled it over her head and stood revealed in an elaborate corset. She danced lightly across the rug, waggling her hips, and lowering her lashes provocatively. Dorothea stared at her, open-mouthed, and Jay said:

"Ohmigod!"

"Ta - ra - ra - *boom* - de - ay!" Mrs. Wardley sang, unhooking the corset eyelet by eyelet, until it dropped on the floor.

"*Mother!*" Dorothea shrilly screamed. "What are you *doing?*"

"One, two, three, *kick!*" Mrs. Wardley said, kicking a plump leg high in the air. "Shake it but don't break it, sister! That's the way to do the Varsity Drag!"

"Mother, stop it!"

"Hey, look!" Mrs. Wardley said delightedly, pausing at an inlaid ivory box on a table. "Stogies! Haven't had a good stogy since Altoona." She took a slim cigar from the box, and struck a match by applying it to her bottom. Then she lit the cigar and puffed happily.

"Stop it, stop it!" Dorothea screamed. "You never told me you were *that* kind of woman—"

"Time you woke up, junior," Mrs. Wardley giggled. "You and that little pipsqueak Burgess!"

"Don't you dare say any-

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thing against Jay! I love him! I'm going to marry him!"

"Suit yourself, kid," Mrs. Wardley shrugged, lying on the rug and putting one leg over the other. "A husband is only a husband, but a good cigar is a smoke."

"*Oh!*" Dorothea said, and blinded by tears, rushed for the stairway.

"Follow me," the Genie whispered, and took Jay's arm.

They walked past the supine figure of Mrs. Wardley, who seemed completely content where she was, and followed Dorothea upstairs and into her room.

She was sitting at the vanity table, brushing her hair furiously.

There was a knock on the door.

"Who is it?"

"It's Chapman, Miss. May I come in."

"All right."

The butler's bald head appeared, followed by the rest of him. He looked nervous.

"Excuse me, Miss Wardley. I know it's not my place to concern myself with your personal affairs, but there's something I simply must tell you about."

She stared at him coldly. "What is it, Chapman?"

"It's about Mr. Burgess, Miss. You see, our cabins aboard the *Eastern Star* were adjacent, and the walls were not especially thick. I couldn't help overhearing certain—things. Things that took place, with, I might say, monotonous regularity. It's most disturbing for me, Miss—"

"What things, Chapman?"

"Things involving, er, a woman, Miss."

"Why, that traitor!" Jay said.

"What woman?"

"The woman's name was, I believe, Blossom." He spoke the name distastefully. "She was the companion of that dark, unpleasant-looking fellow, called Leon. A rather blonde woman, not without physical appeal."

"What are you trying to say, Chapman? Are you telling me that there was—something between my fiance and that—that woman?"

"Indeed, Miss, I would have to say there was *nothing* between them." He tittered. "I beg your pardon, Miss. I do enjoy a little levity, now and again."

"I don't believe it!" Dorothea said.

"I'm afraid it's sadly true, Miss. She was in his cabin virtually every night of the voyage. There's no doubt of it.

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And judging from all the sounds—"

"What sounds?"

"Please, Miss. I would rather not describe them."

Jay groaned. "Now I'm lost," he said.

The Genie merely smiled.

"This is the end!" Dorothea screeched, pounding her fists on the vanity table. "The end! The end!"

"I wouldn't say that, Miss. It may well be the beginning."

"What?"

"After all, Mr. Burgess is a poor excuse for a man. Now you take myself, for instance. I'm really lovely, especially after a hot bath."

"Are you crazy, Chapman?"

"Only about you, Miss Wardley. Did you ever notice the way my head gleams in the overhead light? I have a scalp like a shining gem, a diadem. And the cutest little curl on my forehead." He twisted a single hair around his finger. "Wouldn't you love to run your hands through it?"

"Has everybody here gone *mad?*" Dorothea said.

"I wear pink shorts, and I have the sweetest, boniest knees you ever saw, Miss. I can recite 'The Boy Stood on the Burning Deck' while swallowing a glass of water. And best of all, I am extremely sexy. That, of course, comes from my experience as a white slaver."

"A white slaver? You?"

"Oh, yes, Miss, and an opium-runner, too. You must try some of my opium; it's the finest grade. You can have all you want when we're married."

"Married?"

"I understand, Miss; I know you're overcome with joy. But please—do not make any sexual advances to me. I prefer to wait until we are united in holy matrimony. Forgive me my old-fashioned ideas." He wiped a moist eye.

"Get out of here!" Dorothea screamed. "Get out of here before I call the police!"

"There, there, dearest. You must be calm—"

"Get out of here! Get out! Get out!"

"Very well," Chapman said stiffly. "I will return to my room and await your apology. But do not wait too long. I have a cable from Ava Gardner, and her importunities are most heart-rending. I am," he sniffed, "only human."

Then he went out.

Dorothea threw herself across the bed and sobbed. Jay said: "Shouldn't I appear now?"

"No," the Genie answered. "Let us wait a bit."

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They returned downstairs, and the Genie said: "You are certainly a fortunate man, my benefactor. Your Dorothea is the loveliest creature I have ever seen in fifteen hundred years."

"Of course, you've been away," Jay said.

"Yes, but there was Mr. Hassim's harem, containing the loveliest women on earth. And your Dorothea compares most favorably with any of them."

The main room of Abu Samhadin's home was empty, Mrs. Wardley had apparently retired to her room, and Abu was still trembling in the garden. The Genie yawned, and stretched out on the sofa.

"I am weary," he said. "The effort has been great. Will my benefactor permit me the pleasure of a brief nap?"

"Sure, go ahead," Jay said. "After all you've done, you deserve it."

Jay sat in an opposite chair and shut his eyes. After a few moments, he opened them again, to see the Genie shifting restlessly on his couch.

"What's the matter?"

"It's no use," the Genie muttered. "I cannot be comfortable. I have become too accustomed to sleeping in my bottle."

"Well, we brought it with us. Why not crawl in and take a snooze?"

I dread the thought of returning, for fear that I will be imprisoned once more."

"You don't have to worry about that. I'll let you out."

"You swear this to me, oh, benefactor?"

"Of course! It's to my advantage, isn't it?"

"That is so," the Genie smiled, and dissolved into smoke that poured back with lightning swiftness into the neck of the old wine bottle in Jay's hand.

"Gosh," Jay said. "That's quite a trick."

He put the bottle on the floor beside him, and yawned. In five minutes, his eyes were closed, and he was deep in a pleasant dream involving a ship's cabin.

The striking of the clock on the mantel woke him. He rubbed his eyes, and looked at the floor beside him. The bottle was still there, and the room was still empty.

He tiptoed up the stairs, and rapped discreetly on the door of Dorothea's bedroom.

There was no answer. He rapped again, and pushed open the door.

The bedroom was empty.

He came down the stairs hurriedly, calling her name.

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There was a giggle, an infinitely tiny giggle, somewhere in the room.

"Dorothea? Is that you?"

The giggle repeated, this time with a faint trace of concupiscence.

"Where are you?" Jay said.

"Go 'way," said an incredibly tiny voice.

He looked down at the floor, and his eyes widened with disbelief at the notion that struck him. He went to the Genie's bottle, picked it up and peered down the neck. There was only darkness inside.

"Genie," he said. "Are you in there?"

"I'm here," the Genie's voice said, sounding as if greatly distant. "Is there something you wish, my benefactor?"

Jay hesitated to ask the question, but he said: "Are you—are you alone?"

Again the giggle—unquestionably from the bottle!

"Genie!" Jay shouted.

"Please," the Genie said. "You needn't raise your voice, my benefactor."

"Yes," Dorothea said, "stop raising your silly voice."

"Dorothea! Are you in there!"

"Of course, you dope. Now go away and stop bothering us."

"But how—"

"It was easy to arrange," the Genie said cheerfully. "Terribly sorry to betray you like this, oh, my benefactor. But some things—" Another giggle. "Are more important than others."

"But you can't do this to me!" Jay stuttered. "It's unfair! You were supposed to grant *my* wishes!"

"It's my weakness," the tiny voice sighed. "Beautiful women!"

"But you know what'll happen to you! Just like the last time! The gods will punish you for this!"

The Genie laughed. "What the gods will deem punishment," he said, "I will deem eternal delight. To be imprisoned forever in this bottle, with the beautiful Dorothea? This is Paradise, my benefactor—Paradise!"

"You can't do this!" Jay shrieked. "Dorothea! Come out!"

"Go peddle your papers," Dorothea said.

"Genie! Dorothea!"

"Stop shaking the bottle, oh, benefactor."

"I'll fix you!" Jay shouted. "I'll put the cork on! You'll never get out!"

"Fix away!" the Genie laughed.

Jay looked about him wild-

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ly, and then remembered that the cork was in his pocket. He stabbed it into the mouth of the bottle, and then slammed the bottle onto a table.

"Some Genie!" he said bitterly.

He picked up the telephone and called the American Express Company, to arrange his passage home.

The *Western Star,* sister ship of the vessel which had brought Jay Burgess and his party to Saudi Arabia, was late in departing, and Jay waited anxiously on the dock, fearful that he would be accosted by Mrs. Wardley, Chapman, the butler, Abu Samhadin, or the police. He wanted to make the return journey alone, without reminders of the terrible experience to which he had been subjected.

But he couldn't escape one reminder. In his small suitcase reposed the ancient bottle that now held two: the Genie of Harun-el-Rashid and his fiancée, Dorothea.

At first, he was ready to leave the offending bottle behind in Arabia, but then his love for Classical Mythology exerted its powers. He *had* to take the bottle home.

The ship's horn blasted through the hazy clouds, and the ship's officers waved the passengers aboard.

Alone in his cabin, he removed the bottle from his suitcase and set it up on the table, tempted to remove the cork and make further pleas to Dorothea and the Genie to foresake their mad affiliation. But he was through being humiliated. The cork could remain in the bottle for *another* thousand years, as far as he was concerned.

He sighed, and went up on deck.

"Well, I'll be a monkey's uncle!"

"Blossom!" he stared incredulously at the pretty young face that was smiling up at him. "What are you doing here?"

"Same thing you're doing, I guess. Going back home. I've had enough of the East."

"Where's Leon?"

"That fourflusher? I don't know, and I care a hell of a lot less. Him and me are phfft. As a matter of fact, I've been thinking about giving up crime altogether."

"Really?"

"Yeah, that last business about the Genie sort of soured me on it. Leon was awful upset about the way things turned out. He licked me good."

"You mean he hit you?"

"Socked me right in the

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jaw. I didn't think it was so nice."

"I should think not!" Jay said indignantly.

"Say, whatever *did* happen to you, anyway? Did you get your million bucks from the Genie?"

"I hate to tell you what I got from the Genie," Jay said glumly. "The whole thing worked out very badly."

"Gee, that's tough," Blossom said sympathetically. "Where's the old boy now?"

"Oh, in my cabin, in the original container. Only now he's got company, and he won't come out."

"Company?"

Painfully, Jay related the story. The girl listened with understanding, and when it was concluded, touched his hand gently.

"Never mind," she said soothingly. "I never thought she was the girl for you, anyway. Too stuck up."

"Maybe you're right. But there's nothing I can do about it anyway. If they won't come out, I can't force them."

"Gee, can you see anything? In the bottle, I mean?" She blushed. "Not that I'm curious, or anything."

"No, you can't see a thing. It's dark as pitch in there."

"I'd love to look, anyway. Could you show it to me?"

"Certainly. Want to go now?"

"Okay," Blossom said.

They sat on the bunk in Jay's cabin, and he handed her the ancient bottle. She turned it in her hand, and said:

"Doesn't look like much, does it? And to think what's going on inside—"

Jay looked at her, his eyes tender. "You look prettier than ever, Blossom. You know that?"

"Ah, quit your kidding."

"No, really, you do." He took the bottle from her hand and replaced it on the table. "That's another very pretty sweater," he said.

"Do you really like it? It's Orlon. Very soft."

"So it is," Jay said.

In thirteen days, the *Western Star* slid into the dock in lower Manhattan, and Jay Burgess, only a few weeks older chronologically, but aged by experience, stepped off the gangplank. His parting with Blossom Henderson was a simple affair, consisting of one quick kiss on her pouting mouth, and a promise to call her soon.

It was good to be home, Jay thought, as he entered the family mansion.

He had his bags taken right

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upstairs. He missed Chapman's help in unpacking.

When he came to the small suitcase that held the Djinn bottle, he sighed, and said aloud: "I'll ask you just once more, Genie. And then you can stay there the rest of eternity."

He opened the suitcase and reached for the bottle.

His hand touched underwear, but no bottle.

He threw everything out on the floor in a desperate search.

The bottle was gone.

"Blossom!" Jay shouted, tugging at his hair. "How could you *do* this to me!"

He sat on the bed with his head in his hands, cursing himself for allowing the deception twice. She had seemed so genuine, so affectionate. He was even beginning to think she—

He stood up, his hands balling into fists. He wouldn't let her get away with it!

He picked up the telephone, riffled hastily through the Yellow Pages, and dialed a number.

"Hello, Crouch Detective Agency?"

The man from Crouch, a stumpy little man with a head like a bullet and one eye that stayed shut, listened patiently to Jay's story, and then said:

"Now let me get this straight, mac. You say this dame swiped a gin bottle from you?"

"That's right. And I must get it back—at all costs! You have got to help me, Mr. Crouch!"

The detective scratched his head. "I still don't get it. Can't you buy another gin bottle?"

"Of course not. You can't buy them anyplace."

"Sure you can. Prohibition's over, you know."

"You don't seem to understand. There's a Genie in this bottle—"

"Wait a minute, let me write that down. J-E-A-"

"No, no, G. E. N. I. E. It's also spelled D-J-I-N-N-I. Sometimes just J-I-N-N-I. You don't have to write all that down."

"I want all the facts, mac, *all* the facts." Mr. Crouch was scrawling busily. "And this other gal in there, this Dorothy—"

"Dorothea," Jay said patiently. "Her name is Dorothea Wardley."

"And you say these two gals are in this bottle?"

"No, no. One of them is a man. I mean, he looks like a man, but he's really a Genie. The other is a girl, named Dorothea. Now do you understand?"

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"Sure, I get it. Now how come this gal fell in this here bottle?"

"She didn't *fall* into the bottle. How could anybody *fall* into a bottle?" Jay was getting exasperated.

"Search me, pal, it's your bottle. Then if she didn't fall, how did she get in there?"

"The Genie took her in there, that's how."

"And how did *he* get in there?"

"He was *always* there. He turns into smoke, you see, and that's how he does it."

"Oh, I get it. Now how big a bottle is this; pretty big, I guess, huh?"

"No, no, it's just an ordinary size wine bottle."

"But those two people that are in there, how big are they?"

"Well, they're ordinary size, too, but not anymore. Now they're just big enough to fit into the bottle."

"Oh, now I get it," Crouch said, nodding. "These people got sort of shrunk up and fell in this here bottle."

"No, they didn't *fall* in. They want to be in this bottle. They *enjoy* being in this bottle."

"Oh, I see, sure," Mr. Crouch said, writing on his pad. "But this gal who stole the bottle, does *she* want to get in there, too?"

"No, *no!*" Jay said. "She wants the Genie to come *out*. So that he can grant her wishes. She doesn't want to be in the bottle at all."

"So if she doesn't want to be in the bottle, how come she stole this here bottle from you?"

"To get the Genie *out!*" Jay said frantically.

"But what did *you* want with the bottle, is what I don't understand. Did *you* want the Genie to come out, too?"

"I don't care about the Genie. I wanted Dorothea to come out. Don't you see?"

"Yeah, sure, I see the whole thing. Now where's this dame, this, er, Blossom Henderson now?"

"If," Jay said, murderously, "if I knew where she was," he said, gritting his teeth, "I—wouldn't — need — a — detective—would I?"

"Oh, I get it now. You want I should find this here Blossom Henderson so that you can get this here bottle back, so that you can get this here Genie and this Dorothea out, so that you and this Blossom babe can crawl in. Zat the idea?"

"No," Jay said gently. "This is the idea." He put out his hand and caught Mr. Crouch's

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small nose between two fingers. Then he twisted the nose sharply, first from right to left, and then from left to right.

"Leggo!" Mr. Crouch howled. "Leggo!"

"Now get out of here," Jay said softly, breathing hard. "Get out of here before I shove *you* into a bottle. You hear me—GET OUT OF HERE!"

"I'm goin', I'm goin'!" Mr. Crouch said, and went.

He fell across the bed when the detective had gone, trying to keep his mind free of all thoughts.

He was just beginning to doze off when he heard what sounded like creaking on the stairway.

He sat up and listened, and the door opened.

"There he is, Mike!"

"What is this?" Jay said indignantly.

The patrolman, a great mass of blue in his bedroom doorway, waggled a finger at him.

"Now you just take it easy, Mr. Burgess. We got a whole roomful of bottles down at the station house. You can jump in an out of them all night."

"Watch your nose, Mike," said a voice behind him. "He's got a kind of thing with noses, too."

"What do you want?" Jay said. "How dare you crash in here! Have you got a warrant?"

"Now don't you worry, Mr. Burgess," the cop said soothingly. "The whole thing's nice and legal. Now you come along with us, and don't make any trouble."

"Come along with you? What for?"

"Just for a little rest, Mr. Burgess. We know you've had a tough day, but we want to help you."

"I'm *not* going with you!"

"Oh, I'm afraid you are, Mr. Burgess." The patrolman advanced further into the room and began stalking Jay around the bed. "Mr. Crouch here, he swore out a complaint against you, and he told us a few things we want to hear about. You see, we're all nuts about bottles too. All kind of bottles." He came closer, holding out his hand. "Big bottles. Little bottles. Black bottles. Green bottles. Skinny bottles. Fat bottles—you name it and we'll have 'em."

"Look out!" Mr. Crouch shouted, as Jay tried to bulldoze his way past the officer. "Hold him, Mike!"

"I got you!" the officer cried, pinning his arms to his back. "Now take it easy, pal—"

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"Let me go!" Jay shrieked. "I didn't do anything!"

"Of course not, of course not!" the cop gasped. "We just want to help you—"

"You think I'm crazy!" Jay shouted. "That's what you think!"

"Tsk, tsk," Mr. Crouch clucked. "Nice young man like that, plenty of money. Makes you wonder."

"Stop fightin'," the cop said. "Just relax and you'll be okay, Mr. Burgess."

Jay collapsed all at once.

"All right," he said numbly. "I suppose I'll have to go with you and explain the whole thing. Then you'll see I was telling the truth. You'll understand what I'm talking about."

"That's a good boy," the officer said.

It was surprising. It was hard to understand. But for some reason, the audience who listened attentively to Jay Burgess's explanation of his attack on Mr. Crouch didn't seem impressed. They stared at him blankly, not even raising questions concerning his story about Blossom, Dorothea, and the Genie. They simply listened, and when the tale was told, the desk sergeant said:

"Put him in the cooler for the night. We'll let him chat with the police psychiatrist in the morning."

Jay didn't protest any more; there was no more rebellion in him. He went placidly to the cell, and slept heavily through the night. In the morning, faced with a clearer head, the refreshment of sleep, and with intelligent people to talk to, he would straighten out the whole silly mess.

But that turned out surprisingly too. The police psychiatrist, a gentle-voiced man with a habit of continually scratching under his right arm, listened with sympathy to the story which Jay Burgess was rapidly growing sick of telling. Then he scratched under his right arm, and said:

"Mr. Burgess, I don't want you to think that there's anything shameful in mental disease. That's the first thought I want to impress you with. Don't ever be *ashamed* of your illness."

"Illness?" Jay blinked. "What illness?"

"Now, now," the doctor smiled and scratched under his right arm. "Let's not try and diagnose ourselves, eh? We'll let the proper persons do that job for us, eh?"

"You mean you're going to hold me here?"

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"Just for a while, until we know what's wrong with you, Mr. Burgess."

"But there's *nothing* wrong with me!"

"Well, we'll see," the doctor said, scratching. "Good day, Mr. Burgess."

"Wait a minute—" He grabbed at his sleeve. "You can't walk off and leave me like this—"

"Please, Mr. Burgess. No violence."

"Violence? I ought to punch you right in the nose!"

"The nose?" the doctor repeated, and went pale. "Officer Snyder!"

"You've got to believe me, Doctor—"

"Officer!"

Jay was shaking the psychiatrist by the time the officer came to the rescue.

He heard them discussing him as they walked off.

"Sick man, huh, Doc?"

"Very sick. Strange fixation on bottles and noses. Must be sex symbols of some kind."

Jay sat on the prison bunk, and put his head on his knees.

The worst part was the publicity. The whole affair, unpleasant as it was, might have been conducted discreetly, swiftly. It would have been simpler for Jay Burgess to accept his fate, no matter how much of an injustice it really seemed.

But the publicity made it a nightmare. When he first glimpsed the headline beneath a jailer's arm, he had winced in actual pain at the words:

Insanity Trial for Millionaire Playboy;
Burgess Sticks to "Genie" Story

There were reporters in the courtroom every day, flashing their lights in his eyes, shooting unanswerable questions at him, laughing and chattering among themselves as if his fate was worth nothing more than a few lines of copy. He hated the reporters, but not as much as the spectators. He hated the spectators, but not as much as the "expert" psychiatrists, who seemed to have dug up or contrived a number of complex names to describe his strange hallucinations and fixations.

The trial went on for almost a week, and the day before the prosecution concluded its case, Jay Burgess knew the inevitable outcome.

When he walked into the courtroom, on what he knew would be the final day, he felt actually grateful that the affair was coming to an end. He sat slumped in his chair at

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the table of the defense, watching as the prosecuting attorney, representing all those who thought he would be better off as an institutional patient of the State, rose to address the court.

"Your honor—"

"If your honor pleases—" Maxon, the defense attorney Jay had hired, rose suddenly to his feet. "Before the prosecution's summation, I would like to introduce an important new piece of evidence which has just become available."

There was an objection, but it was swiftly overruled. Behind Jay, the courtroom buzzed. Then he saw the object that his attorney was lifting from his briefcase, and his heart leaped—first with hope, and then with disappointment.

"Where'd you get it?" he whispered.

"From a lady," Maxon answered. "Sitting right behind you."

Jay turned and saw Blossom Henderson, watching him with tender eyes. She put her hand on his shoulder, and said:

"I was in California, Jay. I just heard about the trial; I would have been here sooner."

"Thanks," Jay said bitterly. "A lot of good it'll do me? Who will believe there's a Genie in the bottle?"

"Your honor," Maxon was saying, "the defense would like to produce, as exhibit D, the ancient bottle which my client discovered in Saudi Arabia, the bottle which contains the legendary Genie we have heard so much about."

And he walked up and placed it on the judge's desk.

The stir that the announcement raised was like an explosion in the crowded room..

"Silence," the judge rapped, picking up the bottle.

"If your honor so pleases, the defense submits that the presence of this bottle, indicating as it does the complete truth of the defendant's story, makes it necessary to dismiss these ridiculous charges and free my client at once."

There were laughs in the crowd.

The judge peered owlishly at the bottle.

"And is the court expected to believe that this innocent wine bottle contains an ancient Genie—and a young American woman named Dorothea Wardley?"

"Yes, your honor."

The laugh was a tidal wave.

"And does the defense plan to offer any more proof of this statement?"

"We do, your honor."

"You can't!" Jay whispered

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hoarsely. "He won't come out!"

"With the court's permission, I would like to call a new witness for the defense, who will provide adequate proof of our claim."

"Permission granted."

"Please call Blossom Henderson to the stand."

A chorus of buzzes and exclamations accompanied Blossom on her journey to the witness chair. For a moment, Jay thought she was going to cross her attractive legs and hoist her skirt, like witnesses in the movies. But she sat sedately, and looked sincere, and Jay sat back with relief.

"Your name?"

"Blossom Henderson."

"Occupation."

"Unemployed."

"Miss Henderson, will you tell us, in your own words, how you met the defendant, Jay Burgess, and what part you played in regard to this 'Genie' story."

"Sure," Blossom said cheerfully, and she did. The amount of details in her story made Jay blush.

"Now Miss Henderson, have you attempted to open the wine bottle which has been in your possession for the last month?"

"No. I was feeling too guilty about it, after what I did to Jay. But I *have* heard voices from the bottle."

"You say you heard voices. What did the voices say?"

"Enough to make me think that the Genie would come out —whenever we wanted it to."

"Do you think the Genie would come out now—right this minute—in this courtroom?"

"I do."

"Silence," the judge said to the noisy audience.

"Miss Henderson, would you be willing to prove your statement, by removing the cork from that bottle?"

"Sure. If you give me a corkscrew."

(Laughter)

"Here is a corkscrew, Miss Henderson."

Jay sat on the edge of his chair, his knuckles whitening on the arms.

Blossom worked diligently on the cork.

"Almost ready, Miss Henderson?"

"Ready now, I think."

"Then pull the cork, Miss Henderson."

Blossom pulled the cork.

It was hard to say which sound predominated: the roaring volcanic sound created by the outpouring of imprisoned smoke which rushed from the bottle's mouth, or the sounds

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of shrieks and cries and startled yells from the crowd in the courtroom. It took only moments to darken the large room, to bring a sudden spell of night over everything; only moments for the gigantic figure to form out of the billowing clouds into the solid semblance of the Genie. But the surprises weren't over with the appearance of the great demon from out of the bottle; with him came a startled, stark naked, and greatly surprised young woman, who screamed piercingly upon perceiving her situation, and ran with all the swiftness she could command out of the courtroom, shaking off the efforts of the court police who tried to detain her.

Everyone was yelling at once, but Blossom's clear, sharp voice seemed to penetrate the hubbub and make an impression on the growing Genie's ears.

"Smaller!" she cried impatiently. "Grow smaller!"

The Genie obeyed. Incredibly, the gigantic form dwindled to human proportions.

The judge appeared from over the edge of the desk, his glasses askew on his nose, his eyes wide.

"Are — are you truly a Genie?"

"Of course, your honor. If you wish to see any more demonstrations—"

"No, no! I dismiss this case! Dismissed! Dismissed!"

There was pandemonium afterwards, but Jay Burgess was still able to get close enough to his old friend, the Genie, to shout the question in his ear:

"Why? Why? What made you come out?"

"I could stand it no longer! That woman was driving me mad with her infernal chatter! Night and day—day and night—never any peace! Complaining about this and that, wanting to know why we never went anywhere—it was too much for an immortal to bear! Every moment I prayed for release, and now, oh, my benefactor—" He looked at Blossom— "You have brought me freedom once more. Ask me anything your heart desires—and it shall be yours!"

"Okay," Blossom said, eyes shining. "I want Jay."

"Blossom!" Jay cried happily, embracing her.

"An easier wish was never granted by the Djinn!" The Genie laughed, and waved his arm. "Farewell, my friends. There is a deserted harem in Arabia that can use a Sultan. I am off to fill the position!"

THE END

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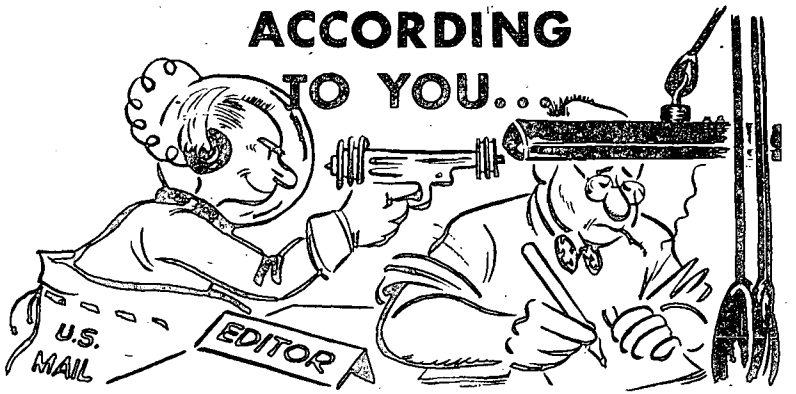

BY THE READERS

Dear Editor:

Your editorial in the January issue of *Fantastic* . . .

It sounds alarmingly as though you plan to use more kinds of formulae, nothing more. Westerns, mysteries, what kind of gibberish is this? That won't compete with the editors who are getting better stories, and could lose you the readers who love anything just so there are plenty of blasters, monsters and spaceships.

Another point: you are much in error to go calling hard names at the slick editors. They have restrictions which you don't, namely, the advertising department. With big circulation you get big advertisers and they are forever raising cain if the editor runs a story which propagandizes against their interests. For example, prohibition stories lose liquor ads, and you just don't recommend saving gasoline in a Satevepost story. The only large paper to beat this is the Christian Science Monitor, and they refuse advertising which conflicts with their policies—e.g. liquor ads. . . .

Your only job is to entertain the reader . . . and this means that your task is far easier than the slick ed's. Of course, it also means that your budget is lighter, too, and in turn you have less to choose from. In fairness, the reader has to understand that.

You are not the only editor with limitations on authors, of course. Some insist on this, some on that. *Astounding* will run stuff you'd never see anywhere else. So will *F&SF*. Some of the others overlap, but they are all limited by something, especially the *pure* science books. You know—time travel okay, ghost stories nokay, and yet ghosts are time travelers, so far as I can see. But the writers catch on and send stuff where they think it'll go. Of course writers should

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write for editors, and editors should cooperate with publishers. Their only check on the readers is through sales, and, of course the sales of competitors. There's a fine unstuffable ballot box.

What sold well yesterday may be today's worst boredom—and that is where publishers in their right minds should cooperate with editors. The sales can only tell you what *was* popular. From this, the poor editor has to guess what *will be*, and not only that, but shoot for it with whatever happens to turn up. Cheer up. Look what the authors are up against.

The only things left that I really like in your books are the cartoons. Everybody likes the little monsters. About the "Ellis Hart" story—don't let Harlan kid you. That's not good writing; it's just good wording, a very different matter. You can run a story like that once in a while, and some readers will get a boot out of it, but not many. He likes that theme for some reason. It's okay for an author to stick to one theme, if enough editors will buy it; but this is a weak theme in spite of all the bluster with which it's written. The hero is a bad, bad, boy. So far, reader sympathy can very readily be reached. But he is also a slob. Furthermore all the other characters are bad boys, and from their actions it is evident that they, too, are slobs. All slobs together in the best avante-garde manner. This is the froth ahead of the wave; this kind of writing goes nowhere. In the last paragraphs, the hero is no better, no worse, he just realizes what a slob and pest he is, and this is integration with bulges. No matter how you word this, it's nothing but a minor chapter in a foolish book.

Have you never seen writing which was clumsily worded but worth a second look? If not, reread the classics. What was fine wording then is all out now; but some of them have lasted. Why? The reasons are inherent in each piece and so far as I know, can't be formulized at all. It's something to do with the way the author thinks, what there is to say—and it can be translated lots of ways and still be great stuff. That's *real* writing.

Alma Hill
14 Pleasant Street
Fort Kent, Maine

● *One point, please: You say we have so little to choose from. Meaning, no doubt, that the slicks skim off the best material. You're assuming thereby, that the slicks automatically publish the best fiction. You could get an argument on that from the bulk of our readers. Their judgment, as you say, is the final vote and we have this in our favor—we know magazines of our type are purchased basically for their fiction content, and while the slicks publish what they consider the best fiction obtainable, they are leaning more and*

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more on non-fiction material for their circulation. Their knowledge of whether their books are bought for fiction content is vague at best.

Another point: The so-called pulps go on year after year, getting their fair share of movie and TV sales, in spite of the fact that they can give the producers no magic names such as Earl Stanley Gardner and Clarence Buddington Kelland. Therefore these sales, you can be sure, are made on merit alone. It is certainly revealing to find that the bulk of stories for all half-hour TV dramas not produced to order by staff writers, come from the all-fiction magazines not supported by advertising. An example: A new half-hour TV series, Amazing Stories, *has been launched and the first ten stories purchased for this show, came out of the all-fiction books.*

One final word on your "little to choose from" statement. The all-fiction book editors do get second look at any material an agent or author feels will sell a higher-priced market. But (1) Does the slick editor invariably choose the best stories and (2) Do they actually use enough to make much of a dent in the overall volume.

As an example, "Feud Woman" appearing in this issue, was rejected by what is considered the top slick market in the nation. Yet, we sincerely believe it is as good as any story of its type we have ever seen in that top magazine. We'd appreciate your opinion.

Thanks for your fine letter and let us hear from you again.

Dear Editor.

So *Fantastic* is going to move. Good, but I wonder how many of your readers are wondering just in what direction? Your remarks didn't make it clear to me. What does "doesn't fit the format" mean?

I have always classified *Fantastic* as rather more fantasy than s-f, and the January issue is no exception. I didn't think it was ever important whether the scene of a story was laid on the far side of Jupiter or in Aunt Minnie's kitchen as long as it was either s-f or fantasy or variation thereof.

Does your article mean that you will publish a straight detective story or a western if it is a good yarn? If so, why? Aren't there enough specialty magazines to print this sort of stuff? Or does the inexorable finger of the circulation tally demand this kind of watering-down? Too bad; this reader outgrew westerns thirty years ago, and there are plenty of very good detective story magazines.

Or have you decided to print serials? We all know that about all of the really good s-f is in that length. I would guess that it is harder to write a good short story than a good long one.

It seems there are extremes in the views on how to treat new authors. I think you have used the middle path and I agree with

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you. You are able to recognize a potentially good writer when you print his first stories, and you credit your readers with some of that insight. If a writer never sells a story until he can turn out a finished and polished job, we would lose a lot of good ones through discouragement. I can remember the first stories of James Yaffe in the detective story field and also Daniel F. Galouye in s-f. The first ones were a bit sticky, but now both have developed into quite good workmen, thanks to the perspicacity of editors. In any case, one story of sub-normal quality by a beginner with promise shouldn't ruin a magazine unless it is pretty weak.

F. W. Zwicky
913 Fourth Ave.
Rockford, Ill.

● *The fantasy element will of course remain the major identification of* Fantastic. *We would not be keeping faith with our readers or our title if it were ignored. But a wider range of excellence is possible. We realize this sounds pretty vague and in a sense it must remain that way until tangible proof in the way of accomplishment is either produced or not produced. An important element for success will be a comparatively simple gesture—the sincere encouragement of writer's creative abilities rather than the continuous raising of the warning finger.*

In a further attempt at clarification, allow us to tell you about a man named Shaw. Cap Shaw, as his writers affectionately called him, was a fiction editor of the '20s. He felt the fiction form needed revitalizing. Now we doubt that Cap Shaw, in the beginning, could have made his readers understand exactly what he had in mind; no doubt there was some vagueness in his own concept. But the key to his idea was his writers. And as a result of a greater leeway and more creative freedom, a new style of writing was developed—a style erroneously labeled "tough 'tec"—which was responsible for vast new interest in fiction and much larger fiction-readership. So, in a sense, Cap Shaw actually made writers like Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and others you yourself can name by giving them a market for broader creative effort.

Please understand—we do not expect to revolutionize the fiction form. Our results will be modest in comparison to those of Cap Shaw, but we feel that our results will become apparent in the form of added entertainment in Fantastic.

In answer to your question: ". . . will you publish a straight detective story or a straight western if it is a good yarn?" The answer in the main is no. But if on rare occasions—and we feel they will be rare indeed—we find a story, in whatever category, that demands to be published—that we feel will entertain our read-

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ers even though they be uncompromising fantasy fans—we will publish it.

Dear Editor:

I have recently become a science fiction fan. I joined the Doubleday Science Fiction Club and in general am very interested in procuring science fiction stories.

I am writing in the hope that some of your readers will be able to help me build up my s-f library. I am willing to buy (at a reduced rate) beg, borrow or steal, any and all science fiction stories your readers are willing to send me.

G. de Sequin
P.O. Box 40
RCAF Station Penhold
Alberta, Canada

Dear Editor:

I have before me a copy of the so-called new *Fantastic*. This "new trend" seems very reminiscent of your now defunct magazine *Dream World*. In fact I suspect that you used some of the backlog stories that were to appear in that in the January *Fantastic*. I'm not complaining, I like it. But you must realize (as must other people) the fact that *Fantastic* is no longer a science fiction magazine. The death of an s-f zine, but the birth of a fantasy mag. one might say.

I hope that the new *Fantastic* lasts longer than the fantasy magazines of the past.

Peter Francis Skeberdis
606 Crapo Street
Flint 3, Michigan

● *We're willing to bet you'll be very happy with* Fantastic *as the months go by, Mr. Skeberdis.*

Dear Editor:

I accumulate magazines monthly and get them read as I have the time, hence I was reading the August issue in December.

The letter writer by Linus Boehle struck me as disgustingly absurd. He sounds like he might be 14 years old. Or else he must be a bachelor.

I personally cannot stand these "girlie" pin-up magazines on the stand, because to me they cheapen a very beautiful fact of living. However, they do serve their purpose psychologically because they give healthy release to pent-up feelings in a certain type of male—the kind that hang nude calendars at the foot of their bed. If that's

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the best a man can do, I pity him—but if it helps him and keeps him happy, why, more power to him and the pin-ups! I don't have to buy them.

I do think that the treatment of the sex theme in most s-f stories has been on the rather "cute," self-conscious, coy side, but by no stretch of the imagination could they be called "vehicles of sex." Mr. Boehle is probably the type who, when the hero of a Western kisses his horse, suspects man and animal of an unnatural perverted relationship!

Honestly, I do feel a bit sorry for some of the 25th Century gals who come back via test tubes to visit shy professors—they must get awfully frustrated, all the professors ever do is give them an occasional hurried kiss—then blush all over. This is Sex??? *No comment. . . .*

Alice M. Dooley
729 Newton Place, N.W.
Washington 10, D.C.

● *But what could gals like you hope for (assuming you're single) if there weren't any bachelors around, Alice?*

Dear Editor:

Wow! What a cover on the January *Fantastic*. That is the kind of cover I like to see on one of America's leading s-f magazines. The stories were good too. As usual *Amazing* was wonderful, but I did not like the cover.

Ted Pauls
1448 Meridene Dr.
Baltimore 12, Md.

● *We'd like to mention the cover on the April* Amazing Stories, Fantastic's *companion mag. In our opinion it's the greatest cover in* Amazing's *long history. The April issue will be on the stands March 11th.*

Dear Ed:

In reply to my last letter you said you just couldn't afford to print a pulp size mag. for just $.35, so why don't you go pulp size and raise the price of your magazines? A lot of times I find it hard enough to buy all the mags on the stands as it is, but if you went pulp size I would buy your magazines if they cost a buck and I'll bet a lot of other readers feel the same way.

I won't condemn your magazines altogether because they aren't pulp size, but I just want to tell you what I think of them hoping some day you'll change back to pulp size.

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Also in answer to my last letter you asked me to name some 35-cent pulp size mags. Columbia's *Science Fiction Quarterly* and *Other Worlds* are two.

If I recall correctly, I think you mentioned in the letter column of December issue of *Amazing* that you were opening a back issues department. Is this true?

"Resurrection On Fifth Avenue" was only fair. "If This Be Utopia," "Pot Luck Genii" and "Revolt of the Shadows" are the kind of shorts I like. "Too Old For Space" was average. How about some stories of the weird and supernatural? "The Wife Factory" in the last issue was one of the funniest stories you have ever printed. Let's have some more like it.

Why not substitute some short articles in place of some of the cartoons? Your new Scientific Mysteries Department is interesting. Why not revive the Shaver Mysteries? Many of us newer fans are in the dark about them.

Danny Pritchett
228 West Bridgeport St.
White Hall, Illinois

◎ *Ray Palmer recently announced that* Other Worlds *has been suspended.*

Dear Editor:

I was really more interested in the letter section this time than I was in anything else. I think that, at last, it is improving and might be the best letter section yet. I shall never forget Bill Myers' mighty fine letter of a few months back, in the July issue. The letter column can indeed come from behind and stay on the top if we have just the right kind of people who are ambitious enough to make each word better than the last one they wrote.

I liked "The Devil Downstairs" a whole lot. This was original fantasy.

James W. Ayers
609 First Street
Attalla, Alabama

◎ *One of the office wits here titled that devil cover, "The Man From Con Edison." Substitute the name of your local gas or electric company and you'll get the idea.*

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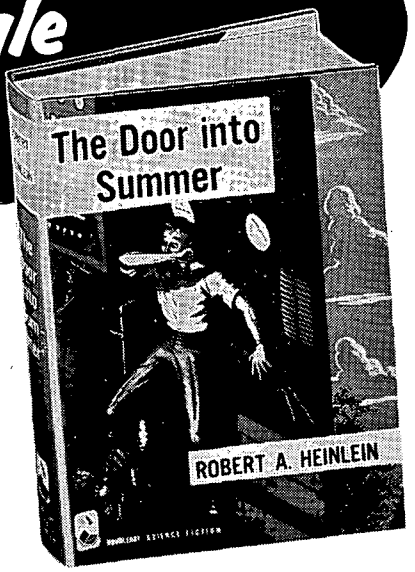

—*Continued from Back Cover*

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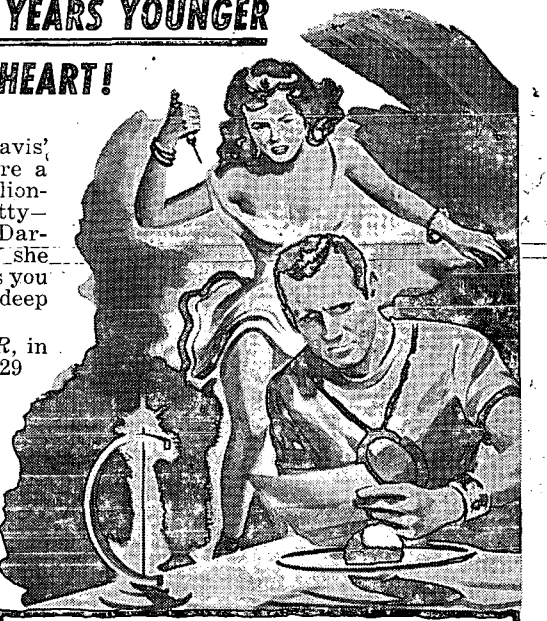

JUST put yourself in Daniel Davis' place. It's the year 1970. You're a young engineer, about to sell a million-dollar invention. You're sitting pretty—until your passionate friend, Belle Darkin, upsets your apple cart. First she steals your invention. Then she slips you a hypo; puts you in a new kind of deep freeze called "The Long Sleep."

You wake up *30 YEARS LATER*, in the year 2000—and you're still only 29 years old! But time has passed while you were in "cold storage," and Belle, your *ex*-sweetheart, is now 30 years older than you are! Well, you've lost interest in her anyway, after the way she two-timed and future-timed you.

The Fascinating World of 2000 A.D.

But there are other attractions in that world of 2000: its women in "sticktite" clothes they just throw away after wearing... its honeymoon trips to the moon... its remarkable new conveniences ...its brand new words of love and ways to live. No more menial labor. Robots take care of all that. Soon you're enjoying life as never before! You're glad to be out of that miserably backward world of the 20th century.

But unfortunately you *must* get back to the year 1970, to take care of one last urgent mission. You only hope that you can come back to the 21st century by taking "The Long Sleep" again. The big question is: Can it be done?

—Continued on other side

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